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V MAG

VMAG 9 / JULY 1998 / READS



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CALL WAITING

by BOB FLAHERTY



It is 7:45 at night and Beverly Slimczak is swizzling her cocktail and wishing that her phone had some other kind of ring.

A jarring thing it is - more like a buzzer - like by picking it up, you might let somebody in from the lobby downstairs. Of course, there is no lobby downstairs. She hasn't had lobbies downstairs since she shared life with Joe Slimczak and his weimaraners on Gainsborough Street. Here, in Chestnut Acres, there's nothing but ground floors, one after another, with a hundred filthy-mouthed little monsters running around slashing tires, chucking crab apples and pissing all over the bushes outside your bedroom window.

Beverly answers the phone with a "Yeah?"

"Uh, hello," comes the uncertain young voice, "Mrs. uh.. Slim.. Slimkk.."

"Slimczak."

"Right. Mrs. Slim-zack. Well, my name is Patty and how are you this evening?"

"Oh, I'm as contented as a cow, Patty."

"Great! Now, would it be alright if I asked you a few questions?"

"Questions?" brightens Beverly, freshening her drink, "Oh I like answering questions. Ask away."

"Great! Okay, Mrs. Slim..kk.."

"Slimczak."

Mrs. Slim-zack. Do you presently own your own home?"

Beverly laughs. "Patty, I don't own my own silverware."

"Then your answer is no?"

"My answer is no."

"Okay, Mrs. Slim-zak, it's been nice talking to you. You have a nice evening."

"What do you mean have a nice evening? I thought you were going to ask me questions."

"Well, I did, and you answered no and that's about as far as I can.."

"Look, girlie, I was led to believe that I was going to be asked questions. As in plural. Now, my drink is full, my appointment list is empty and I'm loaded for fucking bear. Ask me some goddamned questions."

"Well there doesn't seem to be any point after.."

"Patty, Patty, Patty, Patty, Patty. What exactly is it that you are selling?"

"Well, it's, uh, vinyl siding."

"Why didn't you say so? I love vinyl siding! Does it come in different colors and textures?"

"Yes, but.."

"Great! Then let's start all over and pretend I answered yes on number 1."

"Mrs. Slimczak.."

The flawless pronunciation surprises Beverly. It usually takes people five or ten times to get the damn thing right. Her name before Slimczak had been Mantilla, which presented challenges to nearly as many. Her maiden name was Breen. Beverly Breen. A name so memorable they made up songs about it.

"Read the next question on your script, Patty."

"Well, okay Mrs.

Slimczak. Whatever. Are you married, divorced or single?"

"You can be all three and still be by yourself."

"Mm-mm. Into which of the following brackets does your combined annual income fall: Over \$100 thousand? \$100 thousand to \$65 thousand? \$65 thousand to \$40 thousand? \$40 thousand to \$15 thousand?"

Breathing can clearly be heard through both receivers. Dead air is on the radio.

"Uh..Mrs. Slimczak..?"

"Yes, Patty?"

"You didn't answer the question."

"I'm waiting for my bracket."

"So you're telling me that your combined annual income is less than 15 thousand dollars?"

"My answer is yes."

"Okay, look Mrs.

Slimczak, this has been loads of fun, but I have other calls to.."

"Okay, Patty, let me ask you a question. What bracket do you fall into?"

"Mrs. Slimczak, I don't really think it's appropriate for me to.."

"Why not? You didn't mind asking me; now I'm asking you. Just between friends, what bracket are you in?"

Patty sighs. "Well, this job only pays six bucks an hour, so I'm not sure what that adds up to."

"Mm-mm. And do you presently own your own home?"

"No, Mrs. Slimczak, I do not own a home."

"Are you married?"

"No. Not exactly. I'm engaged, sort of."

"How much does 'sort of' make?"

"Well, Randy doesn't work, on account of his allergies, and the baby.."

"You have a baby?"

"No. I mean..well, we're not going to have it. That's why I'm working here,

so I can pay for the, uh, procedure."

"Which you really don't want to proceed with."

"No. Yes. I don't know.."

"You want to keep the little bugger."

"Randy says we're not ready. That it'd screw everything up..

That we'd have to get a bigger place and everything. What he really means is that, God forbid, he might have to give up some of his nights down at the seawall with his brothers drinking beer. See, Mrs. Slimczak, I know I can take care of this child."

"How far along are we?"

"Like three months. You can hardly tell. I go in next week."

"The mister going with you to the clinic?"

"Randy? I think so. Probably. Mrs. Slimczak, do you have any kids?"

"Me? No. I'm afraid not. Of course I have had.."

"Do you think Randy will be ready later on, like in a couple of years?"

"No."

"You don't?"

"They're never ready, sis. And you agree to do the right thing - considering the circumstances and all - but five years later, you go through the same goddamned routine all

over again, and this time they don't even bother coming with you. They figure you pretty much have it down."

"So you think I should..Omgod! It's my boss! I've got to hang up now."

"Give me your number; I'll call you at home."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Slimczak, but we're not allowed



to give out any personal information."

"So call me when you get off. And it's Beverly."

"I will."

And with the click of the receiver, Beverly is up, wiping down the counter in the kitchen, dusting off the hutch that holds the china and all the pictures of Joe Slimczak's dogs. Then she feeds the cat she's not supposed to have, straightens the painting of the mallards in the living room, places the cordless on the coffee table next to the couch and gets ready for what may be a very long night.



(model: mary m.)



a short story by
Art Brunnier

When the Mrs. went to Boston, Ralphie assumed she stayed with her sister, went bargain hunting in the basement at Filene's, took advantage of the discount matinees. These were the things she said she did, and he had no reason to doubt her. It was still dark out when he drove her to the bus station. She had her eyes closed, her chin tucked down into the collar of her coat.

Ralphie said, "I wish one of the regulars would win Megabucks."

As agents of the lottery they stood to collect a \$50,000 commission on the winning ticket.

"If we got that kind of money," Ralphie asked her, "what would you do?"

Without opening her eyes, the Mrs. said, "I really don't know."

Ralphie said, "I'll tell you what we should do. We should splurge. When was the last time we splurged?"

"I don't remember," she said, her eyes still shut. Suddenly they flew open. "I need to stop at Ed's and get something for the trip."

"For Christ's sake," Ralphie said, "what?"

"Toothpaste," she said.

He pulled into the shopping plaza and parked as the Mrs. went into Ed's Drugs. For years now she had immersed herself in the books behind the counter of the tobacco shop they owned. He didn't particu-

larly care for the way her eyes glazed over with suffering the moment she started work. And after work, when they went home, it wasn't much better. That's why Ralphie always looked forward to her trips to Boston, since when she returned her disposition was greatly improved.

She was back, wrestling with her seat-belt. She handed him the bag from the drug store. Visible through the flimsy plastic were the words—unscented, colorless, stainless—marching down the side of a box, an economy-sized tube. This was not toothpaste. She was on her way to visit her sister—and she was taking a tube of Ortho Gynol spermicide? That struck him as odd. Careless too, as if she didn't care whether he knew or not. He gave her back the bag, put the car in gear, setting off for the bus station without speaking.

It was dark again when Ralphie closed the shop. On his way home he stopped for a bottle of whiskey. It was his habit to buy his whiskey from Ed's Drugs. It cost more, but Ralphie liked to patronize the businesses belonging to his regulars; in turn Ed always went to Ralphie's to get his Megabucks tickets. Stationed at the prescription counter, wearing a long white coat, Ed hoped to give people the impression he was a qualified pharmacist.

"Might try these sometime," Ralphie mumbled, nodding at the boxes of condoms on display. He looked Ed in the eye and said, "Change of pace."

"Not me," Ed said. "It's like dipping your wick in jello."

Ralphie said, "The wife usually takes care of it."

"She's my best customer," Ed said.

"Oh, is that so."

Ralphie was half-way back to his car before he realized how strange he felt, and he stood still for a moment, collecting himself in the middle of the parking lot, peering into the darkness on the other side of Route 10 where the drive-in used to be. He could see what remained of the movie screen. Some months ago the owner shut the drive-in and filed a petition to change the zoning so he could build condominiums. To impress upon the selectmen that he meant business, the owner took an ax and climbed as high as his ladder allowed and chopped holes in the screen. The zoning appeal failed, and the wrecked screen rotted where it stood, and the rows of speaker poles stood without speakers in a field full of weeds.

He drove home and went straight into the bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet. There, tilted at an angle on a jar of facial cream, jaunty as a rubber beret, was her diaphragm. He closed the medicine cabinet and went to the kitchen where she kept all her household receipts in envelopes marked and sorted in

a drawer. Groceries. Telephone. Electricity. Medicine. He hunted through all the receipts for prescriptions, his and hers. Separated from the receipts she had marked "OG" was one she had marked "D." It showed two identical purchases on the same date.

He went back to the medicine cabinet and stared into the mirror. "D" was for diaphragm: a two for one sale? With great bitterness he thought of all the times she had slipped from their bed and gone to the bathroom. The medicine cabinet would wheeze open. He'd listen to the clicking of the various devices involved in the process; he'd stretch out in his nakedness, feeling eager and pleased with himself. He always knew when she was about to come back to bed. The water would run, then stop; when she stopped running the water, the bathroom pipes would give out a sort of low shudder and groan, and over time Ralphy came to associate the sound with sexual gratification.

At the appropriate moment she had made the acknowledgment, often unspoken, that, yes, tonight he was getting lucky. During the early years he got lucky several nights a week, then once a week, then once a month. Now it had been a year.

Once, in bed, he asked her, "Hey, are we ever going to do it again?"

"Want me to put my thing in?"

"Well, no, no. I mean, not unless you want to. I mean, unless you want to do it. Do you?"

"No," she said.

"Well, then we won't. But will we ever do it? I mean, is there a problem?"

"No problem," she said.

"If you've got a problem," he said, "I'm not a mind-reader. You got to let me know."

"No problem."

Then, after a moment, she added, "Sorry."

At the time he wasn't sure what she was apologizing for. Now he had his suspicions. He took the diaphragm from the medicine cabinet and gave it a squeeze. It was a bit stiff. Next to the diaphragm was its flesh-colored case. He opened it. Empty. She had left it out a year ago and never put it back.

Next to the case was a gray and white tube. Ortho Gynol. Only the slightest impression of her fingers on the side of the tube showed that it had been used at all. He twisted off its cap, gave it a squeeze. The stuff gushed up, a cylinder of transparent gel, collapsing at last into a gob. It was cold and wet. He sniffed it. Then he took a taste. It had a bite and an unpleasant texture quite unlike anything he had ever eaten before.

Suddenly he was tempted to squeeze the whole tube into the old diaphragm, leave it for her in the refrigerator, garnished with parsley. Now there was an idea.

Then he had an even better idea. He had the car. He could empty the joint account. The shop was in her name for tax purposes, and so was the house. She would get the better of the deal, financially speaking. But if she cared for him at all, it would have to be a something of a blow. There'd be no one at the bus stop to pick her up, she'd have to take a taxi, and then she'd find the little treat he'd leave for her in the refrigerator. Oh, it made him almost gleeful to think about. He still had an unpleasant taste in his mouth, so he gargled with whiskey.

"Whiskey, whiskey," he sang, lurching about the kitchen, throwing together a sandwich, making as big a mess as possible, because at that moment he was convinced he would not be there to clean it up.

Defiantly, he brandished the whiskey bottle, now half empty; he took a swig after each bite of sandwich. When he was done with the sandwich, he lounged across the length of the sofa, drinking whiskey in long, lusty pulls. Then he dropped his pants and put the bottle down and attempted to get an erection. But he was too drunk. And he was out of practice. And somehow it just

didn't seem exciting. He kept rehearsing what had to be done in the morning, his job and hers too. Tomorrow, tomorrow, he couldn't bear to think about tomorrow.

Then something hit him, something from the past. A face. Her face. She was young and weeping in his young arms. They were in the back seat of his huge old Chevy at the drive-in. What was playing? Some godawful piece of crap, he was sure. She was weeping in shame because she had tried to use her diaphragm for the first time. She had read the instructions at some length that afternoon, but now, defeated, she returned weeping; when she pressed the gel laden diaphragm between her fingers, it had shot out like a big wet twiddlywink, slapped into the wall of the ladies room, and slithered to the floor. She sobbed and said she felt ungainly, foolish, and stupid.

He hadn't laughed at it then. Nor did he laugh at it now. He sat with his pants down around his ankles, and the memory of her embarrassment and weeping reduced him to a sobbing drunken wreck.

Somewhere deep inside his aching head a phone rang. He opened an eye and saw that it was light out, he was late for work for the first time in many years, and the phone was ringing.

"Hello," he said, his voice husky.

"Why aren't you at the shop?"

"Hello," he said again, recognition warming his voice. Then he remembered how angry he was.

"Are you drunk?" she asked.

"Not now."

"You've been drinking. That's not like you."

"Yeah. I'm a new man. I see the world anew."

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing. How's it going with you."

"The usual," she said.

"I'll bet."
 "What's that supposed to mean?"
 "Nothing," he said.
 "Why did you get drunk?"
 "I felt like it."
 "What's wrong?"
 "Nothing," he said.
 "How's Helen?"
 "She's fine."
 Ralphy said, "Well, give her a big hug for me. See you tomorrow."
 "O.K.," she said, sighing.

There was nothing more horrible than getting up thick-tongued and big-headed and going to work. But he considered it his duty. Fifteen hours a day, seven days a week. This time someone had scrawled an angry note on a donut bag and stuck it under the door. He hadn't been late or taken a day off in twenty years. And now this! Ingrates.

He entered numbers into the computer for Megabucks. If it was all over, so be it, and he'd see to it that the end came cleanly. Sure, he had indulged in some pretty disgusting behavior last night, and the results of that behavior were all too apparent. He was sick. The house was a mess. It was as if he had decided to punish himself for the transgressions of others. Well, things were going to change.

In the course of the morning, several women came in, but there were always customers there, especially the two old coots who smoked cigars and gave the shop its aromatic particularity. After these two left for lunch, Ralphy waited, determined to throw himself at the first woman to walk in. Now the door opened. In came Mrs. Burtle, who was older and skinnier than he might have hoped.

For Ralphy and the Mrs. eating well was life's greatest consolation, and eating well meant eating a lot. It was true they had put on weight; the more weight they put on, the more they ate to console themselves. Ralphy didn't mind how the bed sagged in the middle after bearing them through all the nights of their

marriage, how during the night they gravitated toward each other without knowing it and woke up in a tangle.

"Mrs. Burtle," he said, hesitating to say.
 Mrs. Burtle lowered her glasses, glanced his way.
 "Mrs. Burtle," Ralphy said again, "I was sorry to hear of your husband's passing."

"Well, yes, thank you, but it was a while ago."
 "How does one deal with a loss like that? I mean, I can't imagine it. Or maybe I should say I can imagine it all too easily, and it scares me a little."

Mrs. Burtle seemed uncertain, turning to the magazines by the cash register.

"You shouldn't worry about it. You're a young man."
 Ralphy laughed with pleasure. "Oh, Mrs. Burtle. I haven't been a young man in a long, long time. If I had a kid in the first few years of my marriage, and if they had kids as soon as they could, I'd be a grandfather by now! Imagine, Mrs. Burtle—mel A grandfather!"

"Good for you," she said, her attention divided between Ralphy and the *TV Guide*.

"So you see," Ralphy said, putting his hand on Mrs. Burtle's, "we have something in common."

Her mouth dropped a little and she stared at Ralphy's chubby hand on hers.

"And well," Ralphy said, a surge of pity filling him, "I feel that whatever age you may be, seize life, *seize life!* Splurge, Mrs. Burtle, splurge!"

Ralphy immediately regretted having said this. It sounded inspirational, not flirtatious.

Mrs. Burtle put her other trembling hand on his. In turn Ralphy put his remaining hand on hers until all their hands were clasped on the counter between them, and they stood gazing at each other. Ralphy was taller than Mrs. Burtle, and he looked down into her soft gray face as the pile of hands on the counter between them seemed to breathe.

"I'm sorry," he said, disengaging his hands from hers.
 "Oh no. Oh no no no. What you have said impresses me," Mrs. Burtle told him. She added, "Life goes by so *quickly*, and we tell each other all sorts of lies, how well we look, how we haven't aged a day, the best is yet to be, but of course that isn't always the case. Indeed, it's very rarely the case, wouldn't you say?"

Ralphy looked away in embarrassment.

"Yes, yes, it's true, we tell lies," he said, wishing she would go away.

She gave him a dollar and the card she had filled out for Megabucks, the numbers based on the birth-dates of her grandchildren. That night, Mrs. Burtle would stay up late and attend to the winning numbers on TV and check her ticket. In all the bars on Main Street players of the lottery would check their tickets too. But not Ralphy. He was an agent of the lottery and couldn't play.

The next morning he rose at the usual hour and went to the shop and inserted the pre-printed sections of the Sunday paper into the news sections printed and delivered overnight. No one called from Braintree—headquarters of the lottery—and so he assumed none of the regulars had won, which was just as well since the thought of sharing the \$50,000 commission with his wife made him furious.

After closing early, he sat in his car waiting for the bus from Boston to pull in. If he had been a little more cold-blooded he might have taken the receipts and copied them at Jiffy Copy and presented them to her. But he didn't bother. He wasn't the District Attorney; this wasn't a court case, not yet. He ended up sitting in his car for an hour, doing nothing. The sun was setting, and the sky was turning purple. That was when the tall bus lum-

bered down the hill and pulled into the parking lot. It stopped, and the door flung open, and a few people stepped off. Then the Mrs.

Ralph went up to her and took her bag. He studied her face. She looked defeated somehow, not at all gratified, the way she usually did when she came back from a weekend. Ralph helped her get into her side, then got behind the wheel, keeping her bag between them. He started the car up and let it warm a little. She still hadn't said hello.

He couldn't stand it any longer and put his hand into her bag. He pulled the tube out. It was crumpled up from the bottom, a third empty.

"Wow. You used all this in one weekend?"

She looked away.

"I'm glad someone's having a good time," he said.

She looked back. Her eyes tightened. "What do you want me to say? Sorry?"

Ralph waved her away. "Don't bother."

"I'm not going to say I'm sorry."

"Great. Good. Fine. Who asked you to say you're sorry?"

I didn't ask you to say you're sorry. I just want to know one thing," Ralph said. "Do you want a divorce?"

She frowned. "Of course not."

Ralph looked away. The bus was leaving again with the rest of its passengers, on to Amaron, the next town over.

The Mrs. reached into her bag and pulled out her spare diaphragm in its flesh-colored case. "I brought this back with me."

Ralph nodded.

"The one at home is useless," she said.

"That shouldn't be a problem. We never use it."

She said, "Don't you get it? It ended. This weekend was it. I'm not going to Boston anymore."

"Great," Ralph said.

"Satisfied?"

"Not quite," Ralph said, putting the car into gear.

He took the half-empty tube and unscrewed the top. He rolled down his window and held his arm out as far as he could. Then he stepped on the gas and started out of the parking lot, and as he did, he whistled. And with a series of strong rhythmic squeezes, he squirted Ortho Gynol out into the street in long satisfying bursts of goo, shooting down into the dark. They had gone a few hundred feet by the time the tube was flat. Then he waited until the edge of town and tossed the tube into the woods.

"We've got more at home," she said without looking at him.

"I don't think you understand," Ralph said, taking the diaphragm case and snapping it open with one of his fingers.

"That costs a lot," she said, sharply.

"We can afford it," he said. He threw the diaphragm like a Frisbee, and it spun out of sight behind the car.

"You're not perfect, you know," she said.

"Yeah, yeah."

As they drove past the drive-in theater beside Route 10, he slowed down. He asked her, "What was that movie we saw? Was it 59, 61? Do you remember what we saw?"

"Saw?"

"Well, you know. Didn't see."

"Oh God. I don't know."

He stopped the car. She glanced at him, stiffened slightly, and he could see that she was afraid.

He asked her, "Do you ever think about it? Do you ever try to remember?"

"The past? Sure."

"Isn't it important to you?"

"Of course it's important. What do you think? I'm not the one who wants a divorce."

Who said I want a divorce? I don't want a divorce."

"Then why did you throw my thing away?"

He thought of his life in reverse, like a home movie going backwards. He tried tracing the shape of the years, hoping to reconstruct something approaching an accurate record. But at last he had to admit he didn't know what movie was playing in 1959 or why, only moments before, he had felt compelled to throw his wife's diaphragm from the window of a moving car.

At last he said, "Let's get one thing straight."

"What?"

"I want you to get a fresh one. OK?"

"I'll have to order it."

"I can wait," Ralph said.

He put the car in gear, turned into the field, drove down an empty aisle. He heaved up over the slight hump that once provided a clear line of sight above the cars arrayed in rows before the great shining screen. The screen was dark and skeletal now; he passed between two speaker poles and turned back toward the road. Then he crossed over to the shopping center. It was Sunday. Most places were closed but not Ed's.

"Hey," Ralph said, "I'm hungry. Are you hungry?"

Ed's Drugs carried a line of canned food, so they went there. Ed saw them and waved from his station at the prescription counter; when Ed saw what they were buying, his white coat seemed to puff up with gratitude. The food was marked up two or three times what it was worth, but for once Ralph didn't check the prices. For once the Mrs. didn't ask the cashier for a receipt. The cashier put it in the bag anyway.

PRIEST of BONES

We were climbing the steep loose shale cliffs on the western slope of Mt. Tom as we had done on countless occasions. It was late autumn and the trees were barren, but the day was bright and the air warm. Mt. Tom is part of the razor back ridge that runs from Westfield to Holyoke in Massachusetts on a south to north run, before it dives under the Connecticut River and turns to the east to become the "seven sisters" of the Mt. Holyoke range.

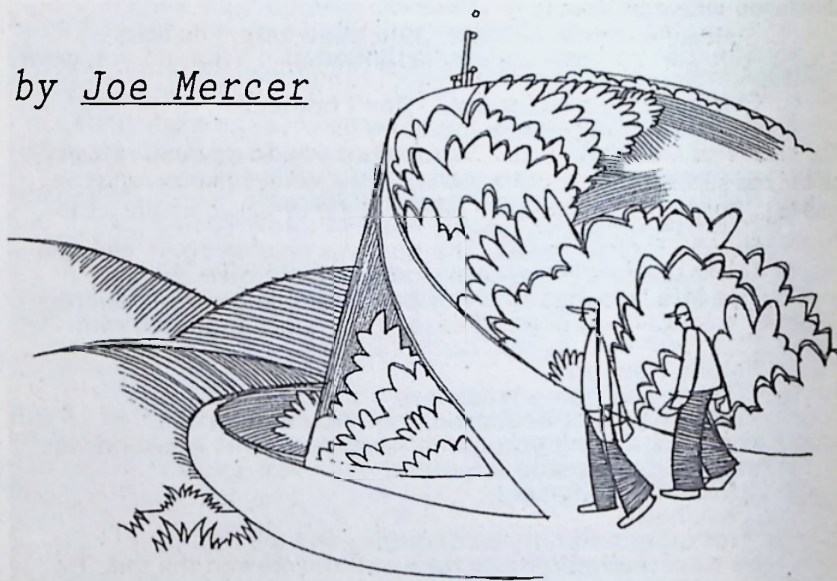
Like I said, we were climbing the shale.

It can be an exciting and sometimes scary trek from the access road that runs just below the cliffs and about six hundred feet above the sleepy former mill town of Easthampton. From the road's many lookouts, lovers pledge their endless devotion to each other. Nearby local high school and college kids drink beer and hang out waiting and watching the sun as it sinks ever so slowly toward the Berkshire hills that lie to the west. On a warm summer night one can experience total peace and serenity as the sun falls below the horizon and casts its beam under a broken cloud canopy, illuminating it with the color of bright scarlet that slowly fades to purple and then into darkness.

Oh yeah, we were climbing the shale. On this day we had decided to climb the trail to Goat's Peak. This particular path has some history associated with it as it ends at the site of the now crumbling remains of the Erin house foundation. Erin built the

house well over two hundred years ago and lived there with his wife until her death during the smallpox epidemic of 1790. The construction of the house and its five-mile road was a feat even by today's standards. You can still glimpse the remnants of the road and its many retaining walls as it runs several hundred feet above the present reservation road, just below the base of the cliffs. I believe that two hundred years ago much of the rubble that now covers the road was still part of the cliffs.

by Joe Mercer



From the road it was two to three hundred feet nearly straight up to the top of the ridge. Erin had a clear view down the steep slope that was devoid of trees or shrubs, consisting, as it was, of loose shale rock. These steep slopes stretched several hundred feet down to the tree line of oak, maple and the occasional birch. Walking on the shale slope was all but impossible. The loose rock continually shifted under one's feet, and then there was the sheer steepness of the incline itself. Erin had planned his road well and built it almost entirely from the shale rock that was so abundant. Shale, having few rounded surfaces, stacked well and provided a wide flat surface for his horses to easily pull his sometimes heavily laden wagon.

Erin had built the road close to the cliffs to avoid being ambushed by the Nonotuck Indians that sometimes harassed him in his travels. The Nonotuck were generally a peaceful tribe but they had strong feelings about their home range which extended from the Ox Bow area along the river and northward to what is now Greenfield.

On several occasions they had ambushed Erin on the road and on the hill leading to Goat's Peak. The worst of these came during a state of unrest between the settlers and the Nonotuck in 1788. On a blustery early spring day a band of four young braves set out to capture Erin. They attacked him while he was returning to town - a two-day trip - with a full load of supplies that were needed following the stormy winter. Erin was on the hill that led to Goat's Peak and his horses were winded. He could see his home only a few hundred feet away.

The road that led to the peak was not as well protected as it was

along the cliffs. Thickets of mountain laurel grew sporadically along the road.

The braves were well concealed as Erin approached.

Erin was relaxed and daydreaming about the upcoming season when the braves came seemingly out of nowhere. The first appeared in front of the wagon and stopped and held the horses. A second placed shale wedges behind the back wheels and steadied the wagon. The two others threw themselves at Erin in their quest to capture him. Erin fought with a strength that even he found surprising, slipping from the grasp of the braves and knocking one to the ground. But the second clubbed him from behind and Erin was quickly dragged from the bench to the back of the wagon where his hands were tied.

Suddenly a shot rang out and the top corner of the wagon's wooden side rail exploded just a few feet from where the braves stood. They were so startled that at first they didn't see Mary Erin standing not one hundred feet away, now holding a second rifle and again taking aim. The braves ran in different directions and quickly disappeared. Mary placed the second shot into the air, intending to keep the young braves running. But it also spooked the horses and they bolted up the hill to house with Erin in the back, unhurt.

(Mary had been anticipating her husband's return and always kept the guns loaded while he was away. She made it a practice to target shoot several rounds a day when she was alone just to let the Nonotuck braves, especially the young ones, know that she knew how to use a rifle.)

In the end, Erin and the Nonotuck tribe developed an unspoken mutual respect, and even traded on occasion.

The best evidence of Erin's engineering feat occurs each autumn as the birch trees which took root along the roadway turn a pale yellow before the oak and maple burst into color. From the valley floor a perfectly straight thin line of yellow appears just below the high cliffs. Erin's legacy of hard work, determination and ingenuity has lived beyond his years.

On a wind-swept day in early autumn of 1804 Erin died a lonely man. Some say that you can hear his woeful cries for his beloved Mary after the leaves have turned and been stripped from the trees, and the late autumn wind rakes the ridge.



*illustrated by
Ben Spencer*

As we climbed the rock-strewn trail that switched back several times on its ascent to the house on Goat's Peak we decided to take a more direct approach and began climbing up the heavily overgrown set of ledge outcrops that dot this part of the mountain. At first I took the lead and my best friend Mike followed my foot and hand-holds. We were young and in good shape but we quickly fatigued, so we sat for a brief rest and drank from the water we had brought along.

We talked of what we thought were the old days when we were younger. We talked of when we met ten years earlier while fishing on a hot summer day. Mike asked if I remembered the day we caught and lost the twounker bass. How could I forget? I had wanted to kill Mike at the time.

We had been fishing the upper pond at Mount Holyoke College on a Saturday evening in mid-August. We had tried in vain all summer to catch a three-pound smallmouth bass that liked to sun itself along the edge of the lily pads that were slowly engulfing the pond.

I tied my trusty hula-popper lure onto my line and cast towards the bass. The lure landed on top of the lily pads. I thought for sure my lure would snag and that I'd break the line, but with a swift jerk the lure popped off the pad and landed in the water. In a blur the bass attacked the lure, the water erupting into foam. I had him! I couldn't believe it! Mike and I were whooping and screaming. I reeled the bass in as fast as I could, not wanting to lose it. The fish, clearly twenty-inches long, was lying before us. Mike took hold of my line and pulled the fish from the water, holding it up. But before we could react the fish flopped twice, falling from the hook and back into the water. We watched as it swam back to its place by the pads.

I was furious. I was ready to kill Mike. I tried to catch the bass again but could not; I tried to snag it but it always slipped out of reach. Finally I grabbed a handful of rocks and threw them in the water. The bass disappeared.

After several cussing matches where we called each other every vile name we could muster, we decided to go home. I had just started to get on my bike when I turned to see Mike casting as far as he could towards the pond's center. "One more cast," he said.

Mike's lure seemed to hang in the air as it glided out over the water. Just before it was about to drop onto the surface the biggest largemouth bass I'd ever seen jumped clear out of the water and swallowed the lure. The bass hit the water like the sound of leather slapping buttocks, a sound I had heard first-hand on a few occasions in my youth.

Again we were whooping and screaming as Mike reeled in this monster of a bass. I thought the smallmouth I had hooked was big but this fish was massive. It had to be twenty-four inches if it was a foot.

And then the bass headed for the lily pads. There was nothing Mike could do. The bass snagged the lure onto the pads, trying to shake itself free. Mike yelled at me to wade out through the pads to grab the fish. I replied that I'd be glad to hold his pole while he waded out. Suddenly it didn't matter anyway as the bass had now freed itself. Mike and I looked at each other and laughed. No one was going to believe this two-fish story.

We had started a friendship that summer that grew with each passing day. A friendship that some people never have. We felt good about ourselves and about each other. We knew that there was nothing we would not do for each other. We never said

it out loud, we just knew it.

Little did I know Mike was to die in a freak car accident while serving in the Army in West Germany. Mike was my best friend. We grew up together when life was good and we knew no boundaries. I've made other friends since then but none were or will ever be like Mike. None.

We were still laughing when Mike took the lead for the remainder of the climb.

I say the remainder because we never made it to the top of the ridge. For about one hundred feet below the crest and the remains of the Erin house we noticed a set of thin tall openings under one of the ledges. They weren't caves, but more like castle-style window openings. There were six that we could see that were intact and several more that appeared to have collapsed. We were intrigued, thinking we had discovered an unknown fortress, since that's what the window openings resembled, with their massive sills and head blocks and closely-fitted interlocking side blocking. This place looked like it could survive nearly anything and from its appearance it probably had.

The wind picked up and made an eerie sound as it bent the trees to its will. We struggled up the steep slope towards the strange openings, loose shale sliding out from under our feet. Mike, still ahead of me, scrambled up the last few yards when the slope beneath him began to slide, first in what seemed like slow motion, then quickly, and all of it bearing down on me. I dove to the left and clung to an old tree stump. Mike kept scrambling up the slide until he was clear. The rocks were still spilling over the ledge to my side when the shale slope below me gave way under the weight of the first slide. With a rumble that shook the ground under my feet, the second slide uprooted shrubs and small trees in a path of destruction thirty feet wide and more than one hundred feet down the mountain side. I screamed and vaulted over the stump and up the slope to where Mike was.

Mike, meanwhile, was straining to pull himself onto the sill of the centermost opening. I pushed him from below thinking all the while that we'd both almost been killed. It was almost as though we weren't meant to get close to the openings.

Just as Mike got a knee up onto the sill a hard gust of wind blew dust all around us. Mike turned back to me and asked if I'd heard that moaning cry. I laughed and told him it was just the wind through the trees.

But I'd heard it, too.

Mike turned to look into the opening. For several moments he said nothing, just staring into the darkness, letting his eyes adjust. Then he turned to me and said, "You have to see this, it's incredible." He reached down and we locked arms, me grabbing his wrists and he grabbing mine. With a grunt he heaved me up onto the narrow sill. There was barely enough room for both of us and I remember thinking, What if we fall? But my excitement to see the interior belayed my fears. Together, we peered inside.

Before us lay what appeared to be the remains of an ancient amphitheater containing dozens of rows of solid stone benches. All of it appeared to be cut from the mountain itself. The cavity was about one hundred feet wide and seventy-five feet deep. At the back the floor was three feet below the sill where we sat. The ceiling was two feet above the top of the opening. The floor sloped downward gently to the front set of benches, while the ceiling ran horizontally to the front wall, making the floor to ceiling height at that end about twenty feet. Three aisles

DOROTHY'S SURRENDER

It was on the third day
Before he'd procured diplomacy
From the wizard,
Halfway between the haunted forest
But not as far as the poppy fields.

The others had ran ahead
Eager for courage and a heart.
We paced the yellow brick slowly
With him still sore from witch burn
Earlier that morning.

And on the borders of dark and light
There was a sweet silence.
I could hear the crisp hay
Crackling beneath his tarpaulin coat
When his arms encircled me.

Kansas wind, ruby slippers,
Emerald City glitter,
Olive skinned witches all fell away.
Only his kiss mattered,
Kiss of the crucified crow collector,
The harvest keeper
And I knew

I'd never go home.

- Corrine De Winter

(details from a painting by Matt Smith)



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divided the benches.

Mike started down the aisle and I immediately got a very bad feeling. I called to Mike to stop, to come back, but he didn't listen. Reluctantly, I followed him to the front of the theater. The front wall was covered with hanging sheets of silken cloth, dark red in color, soft and fresh. Again the feeling of fear returned. How could there be fresh silk in a dark, moist, and ancient cavern? How come no one else had ever found this place when so many people had hiked this area?

I turned to Mike to ask him these questions.

It was then that I noticed someone sitting in the last row of benches. Just sitting there watching us. A silhouette against the light streaming in from the openings.

When he stood and began to walk towards us I realized he was a priest, or at least was dressed like a priest. I asked him what this place was, where he came from.

He said nothing.

He only walked slowly and patiently towards us. Again the feeling of fear filled me; now I was in near-panic. I looked at Mike and saw the same fear in his eyes. I tried to tell him that we had to run but I couldn't speak. I tried to yell but my voice only cracked. And then for an instant Mike looked me in the eye and we both knew we had to get out, and fast.

It was then that the priest spoke to us. He told us not to be afraid, that there was nothing to fear. Something in his voice calmed me. "Yes, everything is all right. You have nothing to fear." He said all who come here are friends. And I thought, Yes, he's right. Mike and I are friends. Yes.

The priest led us to the silken sheets. He said we would all be friends. Then he drew back the silk to reveal the stone-faced wall that it had hid. He beckoned

us to come see our friends. He said they were waiting. And although I was calm, an uneasiness began seeping back into me. I didn't understand what the priest meant. Who was waiting for us?

I looked closely at the wall. He drew the silk sheets back fully... and I understood. There - embedded in the wall - were hundreds of skeletons. In an instant I knew that many people had indeed discovered this place but none lived to talk about it.

When I turned back to the priest he was gone. In his place was a skeleton priest reaching at my throat with its bony hand. I found my voice and yelled to Mike to run for the windows.



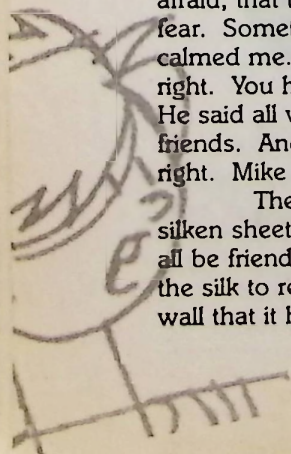
We ran up the center aisle, Mike leading the way. He dove straight through the window, screaming as he cleared the opening. But as I made my leap the skeleton priest caught hold of my pants and pulled me back inside. I kicked and thrashed, now on my back, terrified for my life. The wall-born skeletons were slowly freeing themselves and began to approach. With all my strength I ran towards the skeleton priest, bowling over him and several other skeletons as well. I dashed for the window and dove through to freedom. But when I cleared the sill I found myself back inside the theater being pawed at and clutched. Again and again I dove through the window only to wind up back inside. I screamed, "What kind of nightmare is this?!" and with these words all the skeletons froze in their place as if they were of a collective mind, as if pausing in thought. I ran and dove one last time, thinking to myself, This has got to be a dream.

I wake up in my bed, soaked with sweat. An overwhelming sense of loneliness overtakes me.

Mike has been dead for over twenty years. And yet it all seemed so real. To me, Mike was alive again.

I lay there thinking of all the things we did together. How we explored life to our heart's content, without worry. We were masters of our world, growing up in the best of times, when there was no need to lock the doors at night.

But Mike is gone, living on only in my mind.



SLOW WAVE

by Dan Schmidt and Jesse Reklaw

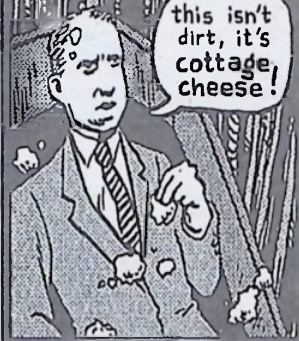
IT'S MY FUNERAL. I'M BEING LOWERED INTO THE GROUND.

THE MOURNERS TOSS CLUMPS OF DIRT ON ME.

I GET ANNOYED AND THROW SOME COTTAGE CHEESE BACK AT THEM.

SUDDENLY EVERYONE IS IN A BIG FOOD FIGHT, EXCEPT THE PASTOR, WHO DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

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Oh, just to feel his hair tickle my thighs one more time. To have his smile open on me again, that warmth which is life itself.

In the lead box he lay squarely, stiff and unreal. I felt the cool mouth beneath my kiss. His hand felt as smooth and unyielding as statuary when I held it. But it still had not struck me that he wasn't coming back. I nudged his eyelid back with my thumb and the bright green eyes did not look at me, did not blink, but focused only on the ceiling where the small spotlights shined like displaced jewels. There was a smudge of make-up on my finger and an oddly sweet smell about him. Into the earth the perfect mouth and oversized heart.

Desire is like a loyal childhood dog. It loves to follow on your heels, watch your moves, pick up your signals. It howls under the skin and sucks at your heart. It begs to be fed.

I did not shed one tear at the funeral. Tears would signify that Death had been the victor and I did not believe this. Yes, Death may have come, wrestled a life and left an imposter in its place but it had taken only the shell of Jonathon, not the essence and spirit. Not my desire for him. You also have know this desire that comes around corners and through holes in the wall like little white mice. Would you still try if you knew that our futures are fixed and waiting like a silent picture show? You are sweet and full of tomorrows. Your hand begs for Heaven's salty forgiveness. You are an evergreen beating, Indian Summer, the

time out of season. You are the lamb locked inside a stained glass window. And you are loved because you must be loved and you must love.

And now November came with its cold gold and now December arrived with its blinking red, green and rainbow lights and they seemed to me like Morse Code that I could not grasp. In no time I had become part of a new landscape and things were shaped oddly and sounds were not simply voices or bells or traffic, they were cacaphony. But in the midst of all of this uncertainty there shined truths that I'd never known. I

saw how there are sources that heal even in the tiny space of a bird's heart. I saw the sequence in all things, the precision that triumphs in nature. And I was part of it all and nothing I could do would make it other-

wise.

On Christmas Eve I walked through the woods. My feet burned from the cold and the night was dizzy with snowfall. The naked trees stretched their limbs toward an impossible embrace. I thought of the others gathering around tables, exchanging smiles. I thought of the lovers warming each other in drafty rooms, the children's sweet, irrepressible dreams. Into the earth the perfect mouth and oversized heart. Into the ground.

I don't think I knew I'd do it until I actually arrived. The ground was hard and it felt like my shovel was hitting stone every time it landed. I believe now that it was only my desire that gave me the strength and patience to keep digging. It must've been hours before I hit the lid of the coffin and a hollow thud came up to me through my own heavy breathing. I put the shovel down and rested. Above, a great cavern of stars trembled. The moon, not turning away from any sacrifice made for it, silently shined. I began to debate with myself over the simple and

Statuary

Corrine De Winter



illustrations by MICHAEL GAYDOS

sublime until the wonders of the world held no wonder at all. So I was sitting on the lid of the coffin on the eve of Christmas and snowfall was slowly placing a halo on my head. I never once asked myself what I was doing there. It was one of those small details that's part of a bigger picture; even if I couldn't see it then I knew one existed. For a few minutes, sitting there, it felt like the cliché When Hell Freezes Over.

Within an hour I was pulling at the latches. The heavy lid snapped back. It took a moment to focus on the features of Jonathon. What did I expect to see there? A close resemblance to the man I loved? It was undoubtedly the remains of Jonathon but his skin looking like moonlight and his hair seeming darker, longer. And on his lips a smile tugged at the edges. I said a prayer and looked up toward the stars.

Years before I had met Jonathon, before a man had ever so much as touched my skin, I had dreamed of a warm-hearted lover with an easy laugh. Now I dreamed once more. Of a warm-hearted lover. Of my own easy laugh.

Just close your eyes. You are here beside him, your hand resting on the region of his heart and if you listen hard enough, long enough, you can hear a beating like a far-off marching band coming into town.

Just close your eyes.

Jasmine had always been my favorite flower and now it seemed as though I was steeped in a field of them. They overwhelmed my senses with their bright smell. The trees were not bare with only starlings fluttering on them like leaves, but instead were green, lush and full of the movement and shine of life. I was squinting against the sunshine and its warmth embraced me, wrapped my skin in gold. Jesus, was I dreaming? Jonathon was nowhere. If I were dreaming, I could conjure him. And I became sad because he'd somehow been left out of this new world. But surely I was dreaming and soon I would wake to the bitter cold. How does a grave robber reinvent the present? By diving into the past.

Against the sky the columns of poplars stood erect as sentinels. I walked toward them, my feet no longer tight with frost but sensitive to the soft field grass. My clothes felt too heavy now, the clumsy wool overcoat hanging about my shoulders like a tired child. As I walked I let it fall to the ground. The warm breeze wrapped my dress around me and I slipped through the trees. There was a small pond, still except for the dragonflies that wavered above it and occasionally skimmed the surface. As I watched their motion I realized I was no longer alone. Someone was watching me.

She was perhaps the most beautiful

person I had ever seen. A woman, yes, but without the sharp definition of one. She moved like water, her limbs and hair and fingers liquid smoke. She was beside me in one quick movement. She did not speak but I knew she was asking me to follow her into the water. Life begins in water she was conveying to me. Birth is a drowning. I followed her and she slipped her slender arm through mine, held me close to her cool breast.

The water was as warm as the air but I entered slowly and she did not rush me. Up to my waist now I could see my dress waving outward in the water, graceful as the petals of flowers in the wind. From behind there was a slight pressure on my shoulders. Someone was urging me backward and I let myself sink like a stone. A pair of hands held me down though I did not struggle with them. The sky looked green through the water, the clouds spreading like spilled milk. I felt weightless and although I could feel my heart's beating as muffled and sluggish it no longer pained me. I opened my mouth and swallowed.

I did not taste the water, could not feel the thin river of it finding its way down my throat, soaking my body through. The hands that no longer held me down now seemed busy with comforting. The tendrils of hair that swirled loosely around my face were brushed back. My dress smoothed out, tucked neatly under my body. And finally when I had hoped for nothing more than clean darkness to swallow me there came a kiss on my forehead and the face of Jonathon was watching me with a sad patience, and I knew that coming to him had been very wrong.

I was not Paradise-bound. It only seemed like I'd crossed the boundaries of some brilliant netherworld of escape. I had discovered nothing. My heart and my mind had shown me these things like a Mother who has covered her child's eyes against wickedness. I had never left the icy shelter of the coffin. It had never stopped snowing. In fact the snowfall had become heavier and I wore a layer of the light, glittering dust.

"Do you suppose this was Hell?" I said out loud to the still figure beside me.

I kissed the cold, unyielding mouth. And then I sang Silent Night and Ave Maria loud and clear. A hollow echo came back to me.

I closed the lid of the coffin and closed my eyes

MAG
Joseph A.
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illustrated by
Eric TALBOT

SOUL KEEPER

The door was unlocked. He was sure of it. The old man had never turned the key!

Carl pressed his ear against its heavy wooden panels, listening. He touched the painted oak with his fingertips, touched the lock, the hinge, the frame itself, feeling for vibrations. Listening....

Did he dare to open it?

No! It could be a trick. The old man might be waiting on the other side with a knife or a gun.

But that wasn't right. Carl had clearly heard him descend the stairs, his heavy footfalls unmistakable as they faded. And he hadn't come back up; Carl had been listening for hours. God, it must be almost midnight by now.

Eyes closed, forehead against the door, Carl tried to imagine how things had looked on the other side. He could recall the narrow unlighted stairway leading to the hall below. Was there carpet on the stairs? He didn't know; he just couldn't remember.

And what of the downstairs hall? Was it carpeted? Was the floor exposed wood and potentially noisy? Would he have to walk in his stocking feet so as not to be heard?

If he were lucky, he could make it down the stairs, across the hall, and to the safety of the outside. But wait; if he got out, he'd need his shoes. Trouble was, if he carried them, he'd have only one hand free to defend himself.

God, there were so many little details. Any one of them could mean the difference between life and death.

Carl took the doorknob in his hand, moved it minutely to the left and right. Did he dare?

Listening....

Quiet on the other side.

He sensed no vibration with his fingertips, heard nothing with his fine-tuned ears. All was still. Even the relentless squall of the televangelists was silenced for another day.

The old man must be in bed.

But was he sleeping?

Carl stood up, his back, still stiff from the accident, protested with a dull tug of pain. "Ahhh!" But his wounded leg was better; the swelling was down. Finally, he was able to bend it at the knee. He was certain he could walk on it with no trouble.

But could he run?

What if the old man heard him? Or saw him?

What if he had to run?

Would he be able to?

And how far?

It didn't matter; it was worth the risk. If he didn't leave tonight, now, he might be doomed to remain a captive in this tiny prison for another week, a month, maybe longer. In fact, he might never get another crack at escape. He'd have to wait — months maybe — until the old man forgot to lock the door again.

No. Now was the time. By God, he'd risk it.

His fingers tightened on the cold doorknob and — he took a deep breath — turned it.

Thank God! It really was unlocked! Oh, thank God.

Now, the problem was immediate. And simple. Could he open the door quietly, descend the stairs, make it all the way to the front door without waking the old man?

He didn't know; he wasn't confident.

Feeling the punch of his heart against the inside of his chest, Carl willed himself to be calm.

I'd better take another minute and think.

He had to remember everything, to picture precisely all the features of the old house. He wanted to anticipate every obstacle between here and freedom. Were there irregularities in the walls? Would he find furniture blocking his way in the darkness? Did the outside door open outward, or inward? He had to remember, he had to....

His life depended on it.

Carl sat down on the carpet, his back to the door, and, for the millionth time, he ran through all of it in his memory.

The First Day

The fight with Lucy had been a stupid thing. Tithing for Christ sake! Now she wanted him to pledge twenty percent of his income to the church! Twenty percent!

"You're the one who 'got religion,' but I'm the one who's paying for it!"

Her eyes did their best Tammy Bakker imitation, filling quickly with sparkling tears. It was

as if her pudgy body were sculpted from a wet sponge, and he was squeezing it.

His anger rose as he scanned their checkbook. April third, check number 215 paid to The Church of the Christian Soldiers, fifteen dollars. April tenth, twenty-five dollars. April 17, twenty-five dollars. Good God, he only earned \$304.00 a week at the gas station! There was the rent, the car payments, Jilly's braces. Good God, there was food to buy!

"You're already giving away twenty-five dollars a week! Do you know how long it takes me to earn twenty-five dollars? Jesus, Lucy, we can't afford your religion!"

Her mouth opened. Her right hand fluttered up to her chest, perched like a dove upon her heart. She took a step backward. "I... I..."

Carl threw the checkbook at her. Though it missed her head by inches, it must have triggered her "ON" switch. "You're a Godless man, Carl Congdon. A Godless, selfish man. There are them whose need is greater than ours, there are them who...."

Her voice trailed off to a blessed whisper as he slammed the screen door and stomped across the rain-drenched yard to the car.

"You're bound for damnation, Carl Congdon," she called after him. "You're bound" The engine roared when he turned the key. His foot stomped mercilessly on the accelerator. Burning rubber in reverse, he screeched into the road, hit the clutch, the shift, and rocketed northward.

At first there were only a few other cars on the road. Then none at all. It was too dark, too rainy. Drops of water flattening against the windshield made the whole world look like it was wrapped in cellophane.

He took a moment to breathe deeply, willing himself to be calm. The best medicine, he knew, was tucked into the upholstered pocket behind the passen-

ger's seat. He reached back — "Ah, got it!" — and pulled the pint to a place it would be more useful. Momentarily taking his hands from the wheel, he removed the cap and kissed the bottle.

Leaving East Burke and heading toward Burke Hollow, Carl started to relax. The Vermont hills, day or night, always made him feel better. God, he thought, her holy-rolling is getting way out of hand. She's gone crazy with it. I never gambled on something like that when I said for better or for worse.

He knew he had about a hundred dollars in his pocket, the money he'd been stashing away to buy Floyd Blount's Harley. "Fuck the Harley," he said out loud. "By Jesus, I'm going to Canada!"

With those simple words Carl had completely severed all the rotting fibers that joined him to his wife and family. It was over. Period. It was just that simple. The Lord could have her.

He continued north, drifting away from the better-traveled routes and on to the narrow pitted traces that criss-crossed Vermont's Northeast Kingdom like lines in the palm of a hand. The Kingdom was the most remote, least settled part of the state. The forests were vast, the roads were gravel, and the inhabitants were few and far between. As long as he headed north he'd be fine; he was in no hurry. He could be in Montreal before morning.

Trying to recap the pint, he lifted his hands from the wheel. Briefly. Just long enough to drift onto the soft-shoulder of the dirt road. The engine roared as his wheels spat sand and fought for purchase. Wet saplings, resisting the metallic intrusion, swatted at the car as it bore into the bushes.

The last thing he saw was a tree rushing at him. God, it was going to hit—

The Second Day

Eyes.

Two eyes floated before him, staring from out of a mysterious undulating fog. They were like twin headlights in an infinite darkness.

A blink brought the man into focus — the man the eyes belonged to. Dressed in white... must be a doctor.

Carl shook his head trying to wake up. The motion hurt. The fog swirled and throbbed and parted.

He was in a room. Not a hospital room. It was like a library with books on long shelves made of dark wood. Carl could smell those books, they had a musty-odor like the magazines he used to read in the barn when he was a boy.

"You have been sent to me," said the man with the eyes, his voice a whisper. The moving lips were barely visible amid the gray thatch of his beard. "You are in my care now. I hope you are feeling better."

It must be a hospital?

The accident rushed back, filling his mind. The tree charging his car—

Remembering the impact shocked Carl to full alertness. Fog cleared as if blasted by sunlight.

It took a moment to find his voice, "Where... where am I?"

The eyes squinted, but didn't close. "You are at my house,



high in the sky." The voice had a sing-song quality that Carl didn't like. "Our Good Lord directed me to the wreckage of your vehicle on the road. It is fortunate you were thus chosen. No one would have found you. No one passes that way. And you were suffering, so I brought you here."

"Well... I... thank you, but—"

"No, don't thank me. It is my calling." Then the eyes widened to an unsettling fullness, "You're dead you know."

Carl's nervous system seized-up like a disc brake. Dead! He flexed his toes, his fingers. Other than the pounding in his head he could feel no pain, no discomfort.

"Dead?" he gulped. "what are you talking about?"

The old man's face, a bird's nest of hair and wrinkles, rearranged itself into a soothing smile. "You are but one step from the Heavenly Land—"

"Now wait a minute!" Carl sat up with a start. The sudden motion hammered in his temples. Settling back on the leather sofa, he waited for the pain to pass.

"W... what do you mean I'm... dead?"

The old man patted Carl's shoulder. He spoke like a stern parent, "My son, your life ended in the wreckage of your car on the road. Until you are finally at peace, it is my calling to make your time in transition — be it days, weeks, or even years — as pleasant for you as possible."

Carl studied the robed, long-haired figure. Only one word came to mind: crazy.

"I... What are you talking about?"

The ancient eyes were patient. "Your final reward, my son. Your days of peace. Come with me, let me show you."

Carl's fleeting thoughts of a fast escape ended when he saw a gun in the old man's hand.

"To where?" Carl said hopelessly, gazing at the barrel of

the weapon.

"Why up, of course. Up to Heaven."

With the muzzle of the .38, the bearded man nudged Carl up a narrow, unlit stairway. Carl's back was so tense and numb that any attempt to straighten it resulted in sharp tearing pain. With every step, his injured leg shot bolts of electrical agony along his stooped spine.

At the top of the stairway Carl saw a huge wooden door, painted gold. They opened the heavy door, passed through, and into a foyer that connected four rooms. Carl looked around. This floor, like the one below, showed many indications of the old man's wealth.

Carl scanned the impressive paintings on the walls: sunny pastures, proud white stallions, ships under full sail. There were other pictures too, violent Biblical scenes with scarlet skies and sharp fingers of lightning that pinned wriggling sinners to an endless wall of skulls. There was a portrait of the smiling Jesus and behind him a white bearded deity with merciless maniacal eyes.

Carl shivered. When his gaze came to rest on the hand-carved woodwork framing a nearby window, he gasped. His nerves flared at what he saw behind the glass: bars! They were so black they seemed like part of the night.

A soft sob of dread escaped his heaving lungs.

Carl couldn't pull his unwilling eyes from those bars as the old man continued, "Here you will have everything you may require to make your brief stay comfortable and pleasant. There is an excellent library — I've personally selected the titles. There is a color television set tuned to inspirational programming. And of course stereophonic equipment of rare and unmatched quality. Should there be anything not provided, you may make me aware of it in your prayers. I am a wealthy

man, sir. Our Lord has generously provided for me to perform my special calling — I will provide for you just as generously. After all, it is your reward, is it not?

"My reward?"

"Yes my son, you have attained the Heavenly Land. Your stay in transition will be brief. I must prepare you for your journey to the final realm. And now sir, you must rest." The old man smiled beatifically, "Bless you and good night."

Carl could not speak as he watched the heavy door close. He heard the solid sound of wood against wood. He heard the metal key turn in the lock. "Heaven..." he sighed, "with a big fat lock on the pearly gates."

The Third Day

After the initial panic, after he'd had a little time to think, Carl began to realize the seriousness of his position. Gazing out the barred windows for hours had shown him how far away from civilization he was. All he could see were rolling pine-topped hills, distant pastures, and far far away to the south, what appeared to be a stream. He couldn't even see a road! Suppose he could figure a way out of here, how would he make his way back to civilization?

The alternative was apparently what the crazy old man had in mind: to hold him prisoner in this ersatz Heaven until he died of old age, or maybe worse, become as loony as his captor.

Carl had a clear idea what religious excess could do to the mind. He had seen the beginnings of some kind of mania in his wife Lucy. Helplessly, he had watched it take hold of her during the eighth year of their marriage. How quickly its stern hands had molded her, transforming her into a self-righteous stranger ping-ponging between frequent fits of scolding and tears.

Well, he had run away

from Lucy, and he could run away from this lunatic as well.

But the time was not right.

Although his back pain had diminished, his leg was still stiff and sore. At first he had feared a fracture, but now he was convinced it was merely a sprain. In any event, running was out of the question. While he waited for it to heal, he would plan his escape.

He knew the bars on the windows and the heavy bolted door would be problems. Perhaps his only hope was to somehow subdue the old man and make a run for it. It wouldn't be easy; the old man never appeared without a Bible in one hand and a weapon in the other.

Two days worth of "classes" had given Carl plenty of insight into the old man's delusions. Apparently he thought he was "God's man," a modern day prophet charged with the responsibility of preparing near-worthy souls for their ascent into the Second Heaven.

The First Heaven, the old man had explained, was the top floor of his house.

"Our Great God placed you into my hands," the old man was always quick to remind him. "He says you are nearly ready, but yet imperfect. That is why He did not take you in the crash. That is why He entrusted you to me. I shall put the final touches on your salvation."

The old man went on with his sermon as Carl's mind wandered. Vaguely, he heard resonant tones rendering passages from a book the old man had written. A book he'd added to the Bible between the Old and New Testaments. Carl had to fight tears of resignation with every lofty sounding phrase.

The brutal realization hit him again and again: he was being held by a madman, and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it.

He feigned attention and

dreamed of escape.

Today's "Lesson" consisted of a few confusing remarks intended to clarify the Bible readings. The concluding statement showcased the prophet's skills as an orator, "Those of us placed above temptation are nearer yet to the Golden Light. All men must be guided by the prophet, as the wisdom of the prophet is guided by the Light. Yield not to temptation, for those who embrace its worldly rewards will never attain the Heavenly Land, and all will be lost."

The old man paused dramatically, looking at his congregation of one. He punctuated the lesson's end with a stiff nod of the head, then he left the room. His long black cassock flapped behind him like the wings of a crow.

In the silence that followed, Carl heard the familiar sound of the key turning in the lock.

He stared at the barred window and he wept.

The Fifth Day

His breakfast tray did not arrive. Noon came and passed, but there was no mid-day meal.

Could something have happened to the old man?

Carl's brief flash of hope quickly turned into a new terror: if the old man died or took off, Carl could waste away and starve to death.

He ran to the golden door. Tried it. Found it locked. He pounded until his hands throbbed and hollered till his throat was hoarse. Nothing.

Then he ran to the window and shouted some more.

Exhausted, sobbing, Carl settled into a fitful nap. When he awoke his dinner tray was on the table in the foyer. It was empty except for a note on his pewter plate. It said:

One must learn to accept God's gifts with an attitude of restraint and moderation. For today's lesson, you must learn the glory of self-denial.

The Fifteenth Day

By now Carl was convinced the old man was planning to kill him.

He suspected that when he had learned the lessons to the old man's satisfaction, a bullet to the head — or something — would propel him the rest of the way into Heaven.

Or maybe it would be nothing so rapid. He knew the once-a-day oatmeal was not enough to sustain him much longer. Was he fated to starve to death?

From somewhere he remembered a saying he had once



heard, something about those who God will destroy He'd first make mad.

Well, madness was close at hand. He found himself praying that the bodily destruction to follow would be mercifully swift. A quick bullet to the brain would be preferable to this gradual starvation.

God, he was so weak; he slept ten to fourteen hours a day. His health and his sanity seemed to

be draining away. Death. Sleep. Insanity. Anything would be preferable to another week of this imprisonment.

Death was beginning to seem like a friend.

The Twenty-First Day

Carl awoke on the floor when something jabbed his head. He opened his eyes. The shades in

the room were drawn; it would have been completely black but for the light of the television. A profusely sweating Reverend Mercy paraded back and forth on the screen; luckily the sound was off.

Something jabbed Carl's head again. Eyes shifting left, he saw the old man kneeling beside him, poking his temple with the muzzle of the pistol.

"Hey!" Carl protested.

"Ssssh," said the old man.

"It's time for our lesson."

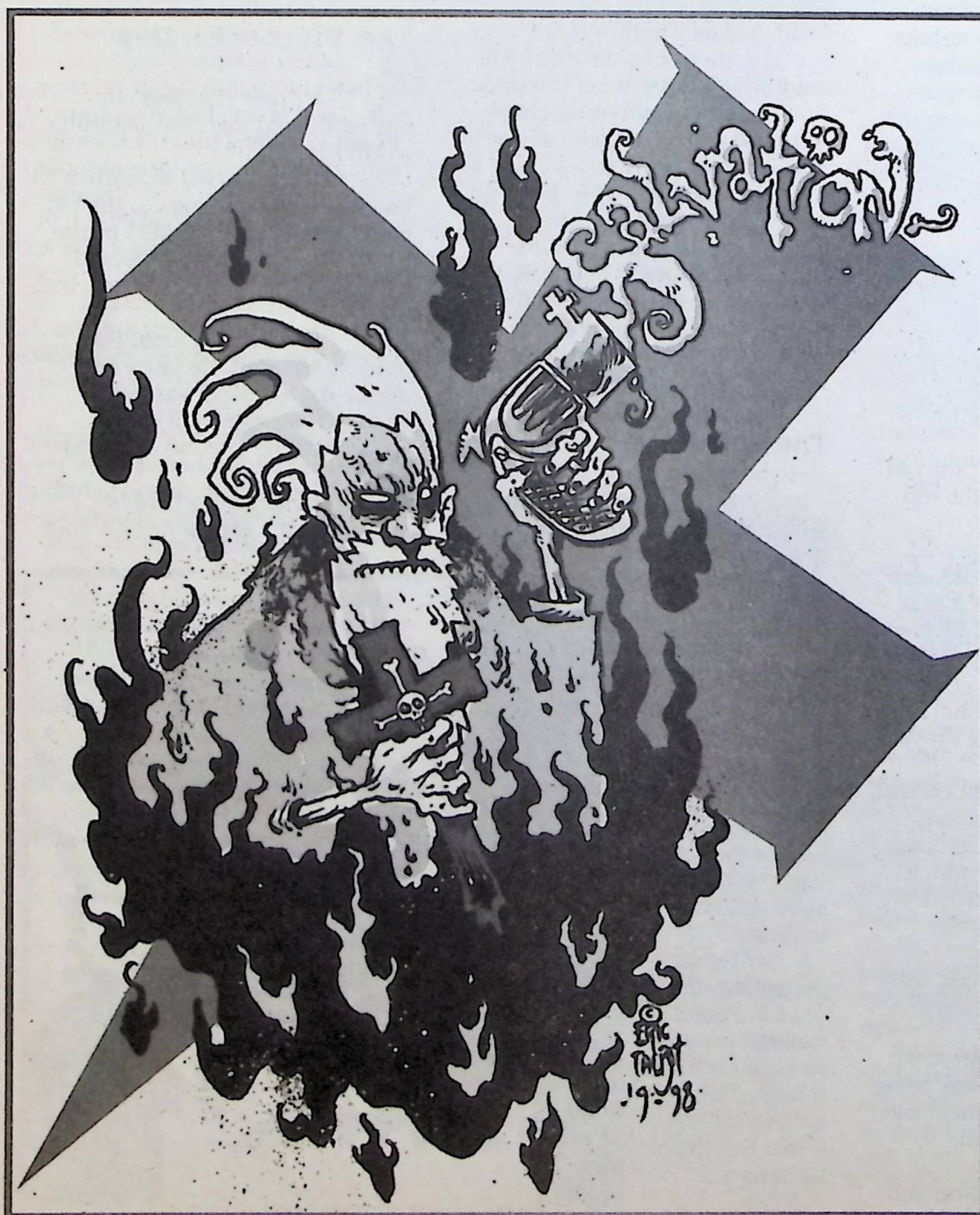
As Carl started to get up he realized one foot was chained to the floor. "What's this? Why'd you do that?"

"Today you must learn to humble yourself before the Lord." There was repressed thunder in the old man's voice.

Carl was on his feet now. The eighteen inch length of chain made walking impossible.

"Now you must kneel before the Lord!" The voice was loud, commanding. The eyes blazed with an unworldly light. "On your knees, sinner. On your knees and ask the good Lord to take you home."

Carl felt the strength drain from his legs. His knees turned to Jell-o. Weakened by irregular meals and the drugs he was sure the old man was giving him, Carl was afraid he'd fall. But even in his unrelenting state of fear, he'd be damned if he'd kneel before this lunatic.



"On your knees before me!"

"I won't."

The old man pushed Carl off balance. The chain stiffened, snagged his untethered foot. He toppled, his face smashed against the wooden floor.

"On your knees. Now. Or know the vengeance of the Light."

A sob squeezed from his constricted throat.

Carl shifted his position, got one knee firmly under him before lifting himself onto both.

The Final Day

Carl feigned sleep there on the floor, pretending he'd passed out. The events which immediately followed were like the short precise acts of a tragic play: he felt the old man remove the chain, stomp to the door, unlock it, pull it open, close it, and descend the stairs.

He heard every footfall.

Only then did he dare to open his eyes. The room was surreal in the unearthly blue light from the TV screen. Rain beat against the windowglass.

Carl crawled to the sofa and tried to pull himself up. The chain was gone but the skin around his ankle was raw and bleeding. His wounded leg throbbed.

When he was able to get to his feet, he walked unsteadily from room to room. He wanted to limber up and to make sure he was alone.

As always, in an automatic part of his wandering ritual, he listened at the door to the stairs. Then, absently, he tried it.

It was unlocked!

He couldn't believe it!

In his rage the old man had forgotten to secure the bolt.

Thunder crashed outside. Lightning lit the room with flash-bright brilliance. Carl's mind worked the fastest it had in weeks. He could get out now! He could hotwire the old man's car and be safe

at home by morning. He could leave the old man and his lunatic Heaven far behind.

Wait. No. Not so fast.

He sat by the door for a long time. Listening. Planning. Gathering strength.

From somewhere downstairs, he heard the chime of a far-away clock. Midnight.

Alertness splashed over him like a cold shower.

Yes, the old man must be asleep.

And Carl was ready.

He turned the knob. The door opened with a muffled click.

Carl removed his shoes, tucked one into his belt and carried the other — a weapon.

Okay! All set to go!

One deep calming breath and he started down the darkened stairway, advancing slowly, walking on the sides of the steps, back against the wall, trying to minimize the creaking of the ancient boards. There were fifteen steps in all. Carl paused on each one, listening, watching, preparing his balance for the next.

Finally his groping right foot found the soft carpet of the downstairs hall. Home free! He permitted himself a tight smile in the darkness.

The main door, his exit, was at the end of the shadowy thirty-foot hallway. On either side of the door white moonlight shone through narrow panels of cut glass. So close to freedom.

He thought of Lucy.

Maybe he could talk some sense into her now. He could tell her about the crazy old man whose religion made him believe Heaven was on the second floor of his house. What would Lucy say to that? What would the police say?

God, it was almost funny....

Squinting down the dark hall, he was sure one of the doors along either side concealed the sleeping prophet. But which?

It didn't matter.

Now was the time. He'd

make a run for it.

Carl began a graceless tip-toed sprint down the carpeted hall. He was pleased with himself for making no noise.

With the exhilaration of a front runner breaking the tape, he reached the door. His prize was waiting for him; he couldn't believe it. The key was in the lock!

He tugged at the door, turning the key at the same time.

Lightning flashed again, throwing the hall into painful light. But the light didn't go out.

Terror knotted Carl's face. He felt a lump moving in his stomach. Blood seemed to drain from his body, leaving him cold, weak and afraid as he faced the old man.

The prophet was dressed in a long gray robe. His white hair, wild and abundant, made him look like the mad artist's rendering of a violent Old Testament God.

Carl withered in the old man's stare. From the gnarled hand a revolver's barrel also stared, cold and unblinking.

The old man's voice was like thunder, "You have been a fool, and you've proven yourself a sinner. You have failed your test, revealed the kind of soul you possess. In spite of my warnings, my help, and my prayers, you have yielded to temptation, forever forsaking your place above."

He lifted the revolver with both hands, leveled it at Carl's forehead. "For your transgression, it is the calling of the prophet to see that you are punished. Damnation — that is your fate. Damnation for your sins, now and forever."

And so saying, the old man motioned with his weapon, and pulled open the heavy door to the basement.

Tuesdays After Midnight

by Corrine
De Winter

You know sometimes Charlie I go all limp just thinkin' about it.

It feels like even the bones in my body have softened. I become the most beautiful girl in the entire world. And then I feel like I can do anything, like I'm pumped with immortality. My arms grow lighter, transparent and heart-shaped like the clear wings of the glasswing butterfly. Charlie, if only you could know my ecstasy in those moments. It's nearly impossible not to believe you're in league with Gods and Goddesses and the holiest of blessed saints.

One time when I was feeling like that I got to thinking about when I was a little girl. I remembered things I hadn't thought of since then. Like being in Grandma's garden where the tiger-lillies were as tall as me, and the ferns tickled my arms and legs. I remembered the scent of my Mama's perfume when she leaned close to me for a goodnight kiss. It smelled like cloves and cinnamon, a warm smell. And I remembered Christmas morning when I opened the gift of a brand new doll. The clean rubber smell of its skin. I felt the soft brilliant hair, and the smooth little body cradled in my arms. I breathed, tasted, saw what it was to be that little girl again. When the feeling unravelled I cried like a baby.

I can even, at times, feel what it is to be another person. One time I was seeing the world through my Daddy's eyes. I felt the warm silence of a July afternoon, standing with hands on hips looking at the fields packed with seed and moistened against the sun. I felt the sweat beneath the brim of the worn straw hat. And I thought: There was never a man who worked as hard as my Daddy.

You'd think these revelations came from a pretty little hot pink pill with a majestic name, but no sir Charlie. This doesn't come from a pill or powder or liquid. It comes from somewhere way beyond those things. And I want you to know it too Charlie. I want you to feel it right along with me. Maybe you'd remember back 20 years to when you were just a boy looking forward to fried chicken on Saturday nights. You want to feel that simple joy again, don't you? You used to talk about those days, how they were as easy as a feather being carried downstream.

But there's something else that happens every so often when I'm in that state. I think it's only fair to tell you.

One of those times started out with the usual euphoria. I was looking at a book of Arizona's Ghost Towns. The desolation in those photographs was soothing, the people all cleared away, the wooden shacks bleached white from the sun. No sound. Not even birdsong.

I guess I was imagining what it was like to be a wildflower sprouting through the remains, swaying my bright head in tune with the wind. And then something in the picture changed. A single spider the size of a pea was making its way up my leg. It startled me but I brushed it away easily. Another tickle on my leg made me

look again. It was another spider. I tried to brush it off but my reflexes were awfully slow. Those 8 legged creatures I've dreaded my whole life came from everywhere. Tiny white ones, Daddy Long Legs, thick, fuzzy ones. They trailed over my belly, across my mouth that was open in terror. They scaled my scalp and crept into my eyes. My body tingled with their endless legs. I heard them crowd into my ears, muffling all sound. I felt them move down my throat and slowly, methodically envelop my heart.

The world was inky and tight. I had stopped breathing.

At about 4 that morning I awoke on the cold kitchen floor. I got up, went to the bedroom, pulled the covers over me and slept straight through the next two days. The spiders did not return, but even my fear of them could not stop me from my exploration. I was at it again the very next day.

It's really simple Charlie. See the trick is to ignore that small internal clock that tells you to get rest. After the third and fourth night without sleep you don't miss it anymore.

The first time I experienced one of those soft episodes where everything was jewel-colored and blurry at the edges I'd been awake for three and a half days. It gets easier everytime to stay awake longer. You start to view sleep as a killer of creation. You see it as your enemy, because really that's what it is. It closes the door to curiosities. It numbs you & hides from you all the beautiful details and ideas that wait patiently in the folds of your subconscious.

You know those butterflies you feel in your belly when you're real anxious about something? It's not just an expression. I made them come out one day. They were exquisite, like none I'd ever seen on the outside. And do you know what else Charlie? When you pick a flower it can feel it. It gives a little scream. If it's real quiet you can hear it. And did you know that all morticians belong to a secret magic society? They meet on Tuesdays after midnight. A little finch came through my window last night and told me this.

Don't you want to know these secrets too Charlie?



Naumachia of BLOOD

Inside the colosseum
tonight we are
gathered and sharp,
Honed for the feast.
Cannibalistic charms glint
In unabridged hunger;
strikes and parries.
Semaphores of bloodlust
flutter like moths in a
killing jar.
Designs in denim segue
into ancient dances
About the tremulous fire of
facade.
In a white rain we blowdry
disconnected
laughter on the
embers.
The room fills with restless,
used-up smoke.
In the ebb we prop up our
voices with others'
words.
We are mixing metaphors
with gin.
Truth flounders on the
rocks.
Sirens sing along.
Luck scrapes across a neap
tide bottom.
Beauty grinds skin-deep in
danger.
A dervish pours with
desperate speed call
ing last call.
The liquescent night
hesitates before the
doors, inside the lady
The viral tiger lies awaiting.

Choose.

- Caleb Brooks

"I AM A ROCKSTAR CARTOONIST" BY: K



KARL STEVENS 4/85

ack 4 to 5
w/ met Coffee.



eye I spotted
playing with

she was looking
right at me...

right?
ay hello...



What's
your
sign?

een from my
dled a -

h...
sion!
you'd
better
believe
it
baby!

KARL STEVENS
11:50 PM
11:01 PM

ROOM AT THE END OF THE ROAD

I've got a room in the city
I've got a room at my secret
friend's
I've got a room at home
I've always got a room at
one of my sisters'
I've got a room at the
journey's end

I've got room in my heart
I've got room in my heart
for what's left
I've got a room for the
empty
I've got room for the bereft

I've got plenty room inside
for someone else
I've got room for one more
Let me push aside myself
Step on in, open the door

The place may not look like
much
But I call it home
I make the best of things as
such
Sparsely appointed, but it's
all my own

There's a story behind that
chair
That chair where I was
sitting
There's a story on the table
Waiting to be written

There's a story to that
picture
That's tacked to the wall
It's a permanent fixture
A monument to the fall

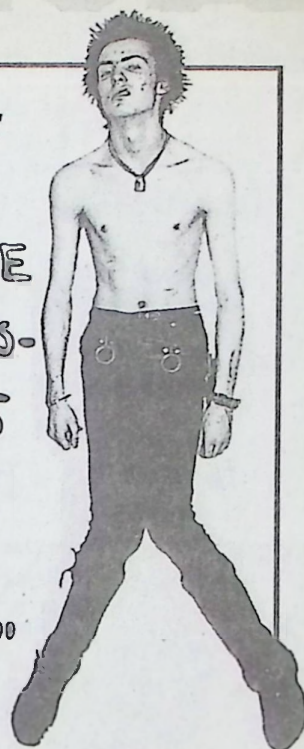
There's ample room for two
As you can see
Won't you stop by
Please come visit me

- F.M.Robeiro
Dec 26-27 '96
Poem #260, from
"FIRE"

"Utterly Useless Poetry"
(Collected Works, Vol. 3)

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The Aloha Steamtrain



Girl Planet

THE ALOHA STEAMTRAIN GIRL PLANET (as yet unnamed label)

Once again, a local outfit reaches out and gives us an exceptional recording not quite like anything we've heard recently. In fact, The Aloha Steamtrain's new CD *Girl Planet* has a wonderful retro sound harkening back to the grand concept albums of a couple of decades ago. With it's majestic mellotron orchestrations and clever lyrics sung at times through a leslie, *Girl Planet* recalls The Moody Blues or early King Crimson. The vocals also remind me of The Left Banke and what used to be called "baroque" rock. Tight arrangements and harmonies give way to catchy guitar riffs from leader Lord Russ, who also wrote all the material here. Modest recording facilities have been used very effectively

and with admirable results. *Girl Planet* sounds every bit as sophisticated as any record from a major studio would and, given the varied material, is impressive.

The opening track "Last Week" is a deceptively complex bit of psychedelia with such memorable lines as "if his mind is so placid he could be on acid, he is."

Hooks abound on this one and at just over a half hour this disc is short, although decidedly sweet. The title track is a fairly straight ahead rocker with a nice chorus, though I don't pretend to know what all the lyrics mean. It's a love song of sorts, I guess. The following number "Three little Babies", is refreshingly obtuse... almost in the "Aqualung" tradition before it segues into a mellotron heaven of flute sounds. Mr. Henning Ohlenbusch alternates his bass playing from the angelic to the ponderously heavy in a heartbeat. And drummer Brian Todd plays with

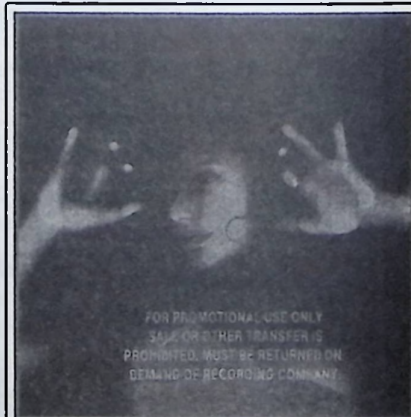
the consummate taste and pliancy of a Ringo Starr, no mean feat. With "The Cynical Mayor's Son," we're thrust back into the heavy metal sturm und drang before a candy coated harmony bridge, than yanked back to the in-you're-face heat once again for the finale. "Before I Come" has a nice twin guitar coda as does the more manic "Waste Of Time". The disc concludes with the early-Pink Floydish "Two Of A Kind", the catchiest track of all.

Quirky and nostalgic this album may be, but my bet is that you'll find it rather endearing as I have. The more I play it, the better I like it.

Bravo, Aloha, and full steam ahead.

(Aloha Steamtrain c/o Lord Russ, 104 South St., #2R, Northampton, MA 01060)

- Meathook Williams



TORI AMOS FROM THE CHOIRGIRL HOTEL (Atlantic)

Hmm... an unlabeled promo CD. Let's pop it in and see what we've got. Oh good, it's a new Kate Bush album! I was kind of disappointed by *Red Shoes*, but this is definitely more of a return to the *Hounds of Love* period stuff - vibrant, lyrical - it's quite a recovery

R e v i e w s

for Kate, she's been - ummmm... Whoops. It's a new Tori Amos album?! Damn white label promotions...

Tori Amos holds a precarious position of respect in the burgeoning field of female artist/icons that has developed in the late 90's. The record industry has recognized the power of the female audience, and has worked to offer an array of different talents for the young female consumer to pick as their idol of choice. Alanis Morissette appeals to the common denominator - younger crowd and a homogenized package; Ani DiFranco for the slightly radical fem/dyke crowd - whither the sensitive intellectual?

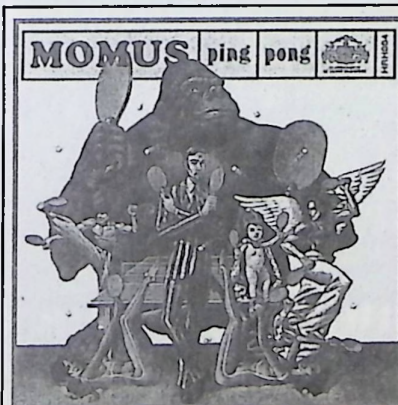
Along with Sarah McLachlan, Tori Amos has gathered around herself a fairly devoted and fanatical following. Enigmatic, obtuse and alluring, Tori Amos has created an image that is appealing on many levels. This appeal has given her a certain kind of untouchability in the critical field, and not without reason. Her mystique has touched many listeners on a level that they perhaps can't quite define, and this magic dances throughout the twelve songs here.

Exorcising pain in a fashion that hints at a touch of aristocratic madness, *From the Choirgirl Hotel* co-opts the territory vacated by the queen and originator of this sound, Kate Bush. Tori wholeheartedly embraces the Kate influences hinted at on *Little Earthquakes* - complete right down to the early 80's Peter Gabriel flourishes that Kate harnessed to such good effect during her peak years (up to but not including harnessing Peter himself, but that's another story...).

Fleshed out by a band, Tori delivers her most accessible record since her debut (this, of course, not including the embarrassingly Benatar-esque *Y Kant Tori Read*). But unlike most artists, accessibility doesn't translate into mindless programmed pablum, but a genuine effort to contain her musical and lyrical madness within a pleasing and easy to follow

structure. The resulting package - tho' marred by stilted 'let's lie down on the xerox machine' cover art - is a remarkably centered and directed effort. Without compromising her artistic principles, Tori shed the nursing piglets and makes a rare leap - streamlining her delivery without stripping away any of the power or magic. Although veering close to wholesale Kate impersonations ("Spark," "Raspberry Swirl"), Tori has crafted a winner. Whether this concession toward public acceptance is reciprocated by a surge in popularity remains to be seen, but this solid effort is certainly essential to the converted and a tantalizing primer for the uninitiated.

- Carwreck deBangs



MOMUS PING PONG (Le Grand Magistery) PULP THIS IS HARDCORE (Island)

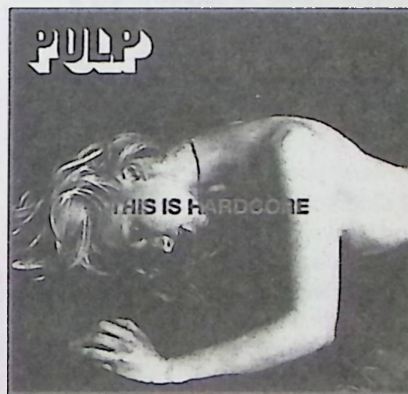
This is a magic review. The instant you began reading it, my eyes tightly closed and I began wishing you three wishes (trust me this WILL WORK - all you have to do is believe). Those wishes sent to you at this moment are;

1. a briefcase full of neatly bundled hundred dollar bills will appear at your

feet in the next fifteen minutes.

2. someone will fall completely and utterly in love with you and you will be head over heels for them within the next 30 minutes (maybe that cute boy in the rusty brown retro sweater who seemed to pause as he passed your table... or it could be that girl you could have sworn winked at you in Stop 'n' Shop late last Wednesday; somehow she got your address and in seconds she'll be buzzing your bell).

3. you will buy both Momus and Pulp's new albums within the next 45 minutes.



Okay, wait for a while. Did it work? No? Hmm... Well, might as well read on while you're waiting... Nick Currie and Jarvis Cocker are two cocky, slutty, arrogant, seedy, shameless and perverted individuals who also happen to be wonderfully gifted songwriters. Their genius can be found on two great new CDs.

Currie, better known as Momus has released upwards of a dozen discs. But don't be surprised if you haven't heard of the boy before, because *Ping Pong* is the first to be issued in America. He has amassed a cult following playing on stereos in such far flung regions of the globes from Scandinavia to Thailand, Japan to his homeland of England. A regular Tin Tin, not only in looks, but in his strangely Anglo appeal.

He's both an intellectual and

a media slave. Currie's steamy Dali-esque world is flavored equally with lofty literary, artistic and philosophical nods (anything from Homer, Nabokov and Oppenheimer, to photographer Noboyushi Araki, composer Brine and philosopher/sensualist Baudrillard), as well as a dizzying barrage of pop culture references (dropping Spice Girls, Squarepusher, Nintendo, Lexus luxury automobiles and Tamagotchi digital pets into his lyrics). But with titles like "Professor Shaftenberg," "The Sensation of Orgasm," and "My Pervert Doppelganger," **Ping Pong's** overriding thrust is sex; for the most part, Momus comes of sounding like a horny Robyn Hitchcock.

The most fun with **Ping Pong** is in sifting through Momus' lyrical content. It seems akin to picking up after a collision of three mail carriers; one carrying a complete set of biographical dictionaries, the second delivering all the trashy and trendy mags from this and last year, and the last hauling a high-brow private collection of porn and erotica.

Pulp's Jarvis Cocker is an equally bizarre and cluttered mixed bag. **This is Hardcore** is the scathing continuation of previous pursuits from '95's **Different Class**. Three years ago Cocker and friends were smirking and leering through the smoky haze of their lush life of nightclubs, vodka martinis, E, and skin tight underwear. On **Hardcore** their tales of partylife excess are spiked with bitter regret, sober reflection and a keenly ironic sense of self-deprecating humor.

Cocker can be easily compared to classic (pre-Reznor) Bowie in both plummy Brit accent and glam-swinging persona, but whereas Bowie's songwriting at times led into la-la land ("Ziggy Stardust" and "Space Odyssey"), Cocker's world is always grounded in grimy pulpy reality. The title track of a seduction turned pitifully sour ends matter-of-

factly with Cocker blandly describing "this is me on top of you, it's what men in stained raincoats pay for/that goes in there, this goes in here and then it's over" is a fine example of Pulp's dour reality. The ironic Springsteen-titled "Glory Days" sounds happy enough hopping along with a jagged guitar riff and boppy keyboards until the bite of Cocker's diatribe on self loathing and generational sloth comes to the forefront.

Musically, neither **Hardcore** or **Ping Pong** pretend to be terribly innovative. Pulp is capable of some catchy complexities and subtle tempo changes, but revolutionary they ain't. Momus is even less groundbreaking; employing Casio and acoustic guitar in equal measure creating simple sugary pop musak. Nope, these are purely lyric driven vehicles... but amazing stuff, nonetheless.

- Stuart Bloomfield

dancers. Now you can pack that intensity into one single package. Not only do you get nice packaging (both the front and the back cover are laid out like a classic Blue Note jazz record), you get a funky record by musicians who wear their extensive musical knowledge on their sleeve. The album is comprised of ten covers (hence the title), and all are top notch choices. Nina Simone, Al Green, the Pointer Sisters, Curtis Mayfield, Osibisa... these are just a few of the artists whose songs are included in Stash's repertoire.

On the front line is Kim Zombic, leading the show with a strong vocal style that commandeers each piece and decides the direction. Her natural talent is just one of the many reasons to catch this band in the clubs. Another is trombonist JB, who shares vocal chores with Zombic. It's always nice to hear horns, and while this band really deserves a whole section, it's evident that additional musicians would only be complimentary as JD is more than capable of laying down some sweet sounds on the proceedings.

Drummer Doug Raneri sets the pace with a steady backbeat so that the rhythm can be filled out by Eric Olsson on tastefully funky guitar and Donny Hayward on understated bass.

If there's any complaint that could be applied to this recording, it would be about its brevity. Clocking in at roughly 36 minutes, it gives you just enough time to whet your whistle and then cuts out, leaving you wanting so much more. The only remedy is to start back at the first track and play the whole record over again.

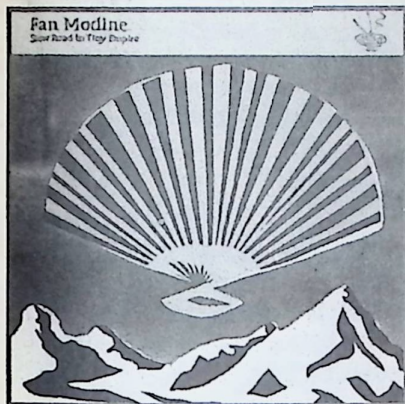
(For more information call (413) 587-0142)

- Phil Straub



STASH COVER TO COVER (Stash Records)

Local funkatzers Stash bring their special brand of sweaty soul to this much anticipated release. Their live shows are packed, and the buzz is heavier than the sweat dropping off the brows of the rooms full of



FAN MODINE
SLOW ROAD TO
A TINY EMPIRE
 (Phovsho/Slow Train)

Here's a fantastic, yet hard to pinpoint debut. Put together by film scriptwriter, Gordon Zacharias, after he was unable to get enough funds to make a movie about his character Fandemian Kirk Modine. Zacharias decided to make a film soundtrack without the film. The result is *Slow Road...*, a loosely constructed concept album about Fan Modine, an American living in China pretending to be a rock star (or something like that).

It's really not all important what the hell Zacharias is singing about; it's simply good giddy fun. Fan Modine sound like a mix of all the best elements of wiggy experimental outfits like the Flaming Lips, Mercury Rev, or Rollerskate Skinny. Old school King Crimson or early Pink Floyd also come to mind; tossed together with movie music from Indian director Satyajit Ray, and you get an idea of the craziness on *Slow Road*.

Highlights include the gleeful opener "Cardamom Chai," or the elegant mostly instrumental "Oh to Be a Servant," as well as the gracefully rising Syd Barrett homage "Marigold." The half hour meditative coda ("Trash in Romance") is easily

missed, but it's beauty is worth letting sink in.

Recruiting assistance from East Coast bands like Come, the Dambuilders, Those Bastard Souls, as well as various members from Alex Chilton's band, the Lilys and Ben Folds Five, in *Slow Road* New Yorker (via Boston) Zacharias has built a quirky side project into rich and varied entity that works wholly on its own. Fan Modine is one to watch out for; perhaps with a movie to follow.

- Stuart Bloomfield



BONNIE RAITT
FUNDAMENTAL
 (Capitol)

As a diehard Bonnie Raitt fan, I'm inclined toward the "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" school of thought. I mean after umpteen great records, what's to change? Well, this album is a bit of a break from the norm for Bonnie but, undoubtedly,

Fundamental is a resounding success. Most conspicuous is the delightful collaboration between Raitt and Los Lobos heavyweight David Hidalgo, though his efforts recall the Latin Playboys project rather than those of the Lobos proper. The emotive, simmering "Cure For Love" will most likely be the zeitgeist signature track from this release. But the rest of the album

sounds a bit different as well, more laid back but more heartfelt as well. Glowing, if you will. "Spit Of Love" is deliciously moody and as profound as anything she's ever written. Bonnie's trademark slide guitar sound is here, sounding a bit more raw than usual and I definitely mean that as a compliment. The woman has soul. One of the constants in Raitt's music is that it is never showy, never cheap or formulaic.

And she hasn't forgotten how to play acoustic guitar either as she demonstrates to good effect on several tunes, "One Belief Away" and the reggae flavored "On Your Side." The latter number, while not quite as catchy as 1989's "Have A Heart," is lilting proof of Bonnie's fluency with the reggae genre. I hope she continues to mine that vein. She really seems to feel quite at home with it. The other cuts run the gamut from J.B. Lenoir and Willie Dixon's "Round And Round," with it's ghostly ambiance, to perennial favorite John Hiatt's "Lover's Will." The usual cohorts are here, including bassman Joey Spampinato who contributes the rockin' "I Need Love" in which he offers up some marvelous "jiggly" fretwork. NRBQ legend Terry Adams tickles the old ivories (which, of course these days, usually are not) on this one as well. The sound, as always, is magnificent.

In a nutshell, this is Raitt at her finest with a little something extra. Her playing, writing and even her horn arrangements are all in top form. And her vocals are eternally libidinous. But somehow it all comes off as a bit more inspired than the last CD.

Sometimes I feel that the Grammys tend to trot out the same old acts to the detriment of talented newcomers, but if Bonnie takes home yet another for *Fundamental*, this reporter will applaud.

- Meathook Williams



VAN HALEN VAN HALEN 3

(Warner Brothers)

It's really no surprise that fans have ignored the latest Van Halen opus *Van Halen 3* in unprecedented numbers. Shelves in distributors' warehouses and retail chains are brimming with copies, and the piles aren't getting any smaller. The big question (tho' many have long since given up asking) is: why?

Coming off 1995's disappointing *Balance*, Van Halen engaged in a somewhat issue-laden break-up with long-time yelper Sammy Hagar. That Sammy had begun to pull the Halen boys into a quagmire of AOR balladry was acknowledged by all concerned, and the glory days of *5150* and *Ou812* had faded like a cheap polaroid. The aborted reunion with David Lee Roth threw a monkey wrench into the stadium tour plans, so Eddie and Alex circled the wagons and retrenched, emerging with a new frontman: Extreme's Gary Cherone.

The results are a mish-mash of demos, jams and barely gestated ideas disguised as songs. The album opens with an acoustic guitar and piano duet (piano by TV soundtrack wiz and co-producer Mike Post, who is of equal blame here) which sets the sketchbook tone for this disc. Even the production lacks the punch of other Van Halen releases. The lack of high end, murky vocal mixes and general lack of clari-

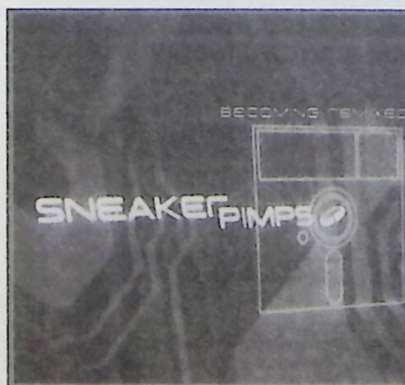
ty mirror the lack of clarity in the concept - it all ends up sounding like four-track demos cut on the third day of their initial jam sessions.

The occasional flickers of life on this record ("Fire in the Hole") are more like watching an aging family pet die slowly than any successful band chemistry, and the much touted "new dynamic" within the band sounds like Sammy Hagar is still singing and writing, not Gary Cherone.

Iron-fisted Eddie needs to relax a little bit, put in a phone call to David 'Weave' Roth, and suck it up, for the grand experiment is, alas, a failure. The credits on the sleeve say "Dedicated to our fans" but I'm just not clear what the fans did to deserve this punch in the stomach (aptly illustrated on the cover).

As Scotty once said on an early Star Trek episode, "Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me...."

- Carwreck deBangs



SNEAKER PIMPS BECOMING REMXED

(Virgin)

Ahhh... Rock in the 90's. Will the decade be remembered for the resurgence of hippie rootsy rock of Dave Matthews and Phish, the death of hair metal and the explosion of techno electronica (a la Prodigy,

Propellerheads, and Chemical Brothers), or perhaps the increase in merging of world beat styles and influences from Cornershop to the macerana?

Nah, my bet is the 90's will be remembered for remix albums becoming accepted as an alternative to buying anything actually new and freshly recorded. The approval of recycling product produced only five minutes before - the artist's name becoming merely a Nike brand name or Gap label displayed on a CD's booklet - no longer seems to be a questionably scurrilous endeavor.

The latest group/logo in this alarmingly trend is Britain's minor hit makers, the Sneaker Pimps. Apparently milking their album (now two years old), *Becoming X*, for all it's worth by releasing this lengthy (read: too long) 50-minute set of trendy beats and swishy synthesized effects reworked under Kelli Dayton's reused sassy baby doll cooing.

I sincerely hope the group is embarrassed by this release. After a vaguely agreeable debut, the Sneaker Pimps future really doesn't look bright with *Becoming Remixed*. Any band that has the nerve to follow-up with an album that contains three revisions of one track and two more rehashes of two others from the prior album must be seriously questioned not only on their talent and creativity, but also their scruples.

I read somewhere that the increase of TV talk shows and "reality based" documentaries was related to the studios and networks unwillingness to shell out for actual acting and script writing. Giving the Sneaker Pimps' band members the benefit of the doubt, perhaps the record industry (Virgin, in this case) have learned something from "Cops" and Jerry Springer in creating a market ripe for the remix album. A little money up front equals a big payback (even from minor sales). Congratulations in advance to the company brass.

- Stuart Bloomfield



KING SUNNY ADE

odù

(Atlantic/Mesa)

Juju is perhaps the most joyful of African music genres. And King Sunny Ade has been its greatest proponent to date, having stood at its apex for about 30 years. The undulating sound of the talking drum flows below King Sunny's cool lead guitar work and the swooping steel guitar of Biodun Fotoke. A full battery of percussion instruments and soaring harmonies complete the mix and in Ade's case, electric bass, rhythm guitar and various keyboards are added as well. Those of you lucky to have caught his performance a few years back at Northampton's Pearl Street, know that it is all but impossible to stay seated when King Sunny is on the stage.

As in much of African music, the songs are highly pertinent social commentary (of his Yoruba culture) or songs of praise to King Sunny's financial patrons. And, even more often, they are praises to himself. While this concept may be a bit odd to our sensibilities in the west, it is commonplace throughout the third world. At home in Nigeria, a concert regularly lasts for 12 hours, with members of the audience passing the stage and sticking banknotes to Ade in tribute. It never fails to make me

think of customers in a strip bar slipping dollars into the dancers' g-strings.

odù, always written in lower case, refers to the clay pot used as a repository of herbal medicine concoctions or important cultural items. In this case, it's vernacular for the latest trend. Like reggae, juju (along with it's offshoot "fuji garbage") is easily recognised by the distinctive rhythm which sways seductively around the various proverbs that make up the lyrics.

Early juju had a rather more modest instrumental composition, while the father of modern juju, I.K.Dairo, always featured his trusty squeezebox. King Sunny's sound is thoroughly modern however, and totally accessible. Most of the progressive radio stations in the area have been playing his music for years. His voice is warm and sensual - almost syrupy - as he breezes through the repertoire of this CD. Call and response are punctuated by electric organ and the various guitars. And Mustapha Lawal's talking drum playing is right up there with that of Youssou N'Dour's longtime sideman Assane Thiam (who readers might also have seen in one of their Northampton appearances).

The tunes on **odù** are various and my favorites include the upbeat "Kiti Kiti," the lovely "Easy Motion Tourist," and the initially a cappella "Ibi Won Ri O." "M Ri Keke Kan" also makes my short list.

This, King Sunny's seventh American release, is a soothingly percussive recording that will have you swaying along in no time at all. It's proof positive that he is still, as he's known worldwide, the "king of juju music."

(King Sunny Ade will be performing at Pearl Street on June 28.)

- Meathook Williams



DIRTY THREE OCEAN SONGS

(Touch and Go)

LOW SONGS FOR A DEAD PILOT

(Kranky)

I've been lucky enough to catch this pair of dynamic bands play together on the same night twice. The first concert on a wintry evening belonged to the chaotic performance of Dirty Three's front man, Warren Ellis and his awe-inspiring adept drummer, Jim White. The second time 'round in the cramped quarters of Chicago's Double Door, the chillingly Spartan voice of Low's Mimi Parke, owned the show after a stunning version of the brilliant lullaby, "Bright." Walking home both evenings, I remember feeling that prickly warm numbness of just being in the presence of great music and great musicians.

Since seeing them play together, I can't help but think of the two bands in a common light. While Low and Dirty Three are distinct and individual in their own right (sounding very different from each other), it somehow makes perfect sense to place them together - a real chocolate-in-my-peanut-butter kinda affair.

So now they've both released new records. D3's **Ocean Songs** is a fine intro to this Aussie

trio. Quieter and less jarring (dare I use the 'most mature work to date' cliché), than 97's rich *Horse Stories* or their rugged punky/bluesy debut, *Sad and Dangerous*. Four albums in and they've yet to utter a word - letting their simple instrumentation do the talking. A simple (surprisingly flexible) template of Ellis building and weaving delicate violin melodies over White's bruising abstract rhythms and guitarist Mick Turner's rootsy strumming. Standouts on *Ocean Songs* are the longer tracks ("Authentic Celestial Music" and "Deep Waters") that slowly ebb and flow like waves, crescendos towering then scumbling away.



Songs for a Dead Pilot (as the name not-so-subtly suggests) is a bleak affair. Low might as well be in the Guinness Book as the "World's Quietest Rock Band." But always in their somberness Low manage to edge their music with a graceful hopefulness. However, on this brief thirty minute collection, the trio has stripped their sparse sound down even further and in doing so, they've stripped away that optimistic silver lining. That rawness makes the tracks on *Dead Pilot* some of their darkest. The whispered lyrics of "Be There," consisting entirely of "I don't want to be there when you're wrong/I don't want to be there when they drag you away," exemplify the mood here, while the equally cold "Born on the Wires" - that ends with guitarist Alan

Sparhawk hitting the same D-chord for five minutes - is as sinister as anything they've recorded to date.

Perhaps, the parallels between these two bands aren't readily apparent. Whether you hear one or both of these new discs, you won't be disappointed. Both bands are among the most thoughtful of rock groups out there, either in concert or on your stereo.

- Stuart Bloomfield



SONIC YOUTH A THOUSAND LEAVES (Geffen)

Sonic Youth reminds me of my old friend, Chad Jasper. Back when we were in eleventh grade, the band came through Minneapolis (our hometown) to play a 21 & up show. We had decided to go despite the restriction of our ages.

It was a drizzly night in late January and I stood in shadows on top of a rusting dumpster behind the club a half hour before Sonic Youth's set. My hands were cradling Chad's slush-covered booted foot as he attempted to scale the icy alleyway wall below the second story window that might let us in to witness Thurston and Kim, Lee and Steve in person.

Chad was all skater-punk coolness and I was his friend who'd sneak smoke breaks with him during art class outside on the cracked

asphalt backlot of our high school. We were geeky-skinny-alterna-boys and when we'd drive around the 'burbs in Chad's mom's Festiva we'd crank the stereo, blasting cassettes of *Sister* or *Daydream Nation*, tinny and crackling through the cheap dashboard speakers.

Now outside First Avenue nightclub with Chad grasping for a hand-hold, I was looking down the alleyway hoping no one would notice our meager attempt at a break-in. I remember seeing a tight group of concert-bound kids walking briskly past, hands stuffed deep into pockets or folded tightly across jacketed chests in an effort to stay warm against the sleeting wind.

One of the group stopped. Squinting in our direction down the dark puddled back street, she stutter-stepped, then smiled as the rest of her group hurried by unnoticed. I saw her try to call her friends back to watch us. Then her eyes turned and found my own. Grinning, with fists white-knuckled clenched and dirty blond hair shaking, she gleefully wailed, "KIM ROOLZ!"

It was then I felt Chad's foot slip away from my grip. I blinked and watched helpless as he dropped. Arms flailing, he slammed hard to the rain-wet cement 12 feet below my perch. The girl had already spun to catch up with her friends, leaving me to jump down to attend to Chad. Somehow, he'd avoided hitting the pavement head first, but he lay moaning and motionless for quite some time as I hopped insanely above him trying to get him to stand.

Stupid high school hi jinx with Chad Jasper... This is what I think of when I hear Sonic Youth's got yet another new album. I'm reminded of being young and star struck and wanting desperately to be cool. *A Thousand Leaves* isn't bad (it isn't all that good either); it reminds me of times gone by and makes me nostalgic. Perhaps in the same way Barry Manilow's *Greatest Hits Volume II* made Chad's mom misty.

-Stuart Bloomfield



**CLAUDIA MALIBU
CAN'T HOLD
BACK THE
ROCKET**
(Wormco)

As the late Sun Ra often said, "Space is the place." And space seems to be the general theme of Claudia Malibu's *Can't Hold Back The Rocket* mini CD (6 songs).

Borrowing from such greats as The Kinks (on "Red Dress") and REM ("Indiana"), this group sounds both sincere and upbeat. "Worst Day In December", combines the simplicity of Velvet Underground with the tight craftsmanship of early English new wave.

Well thought out tempo changes, and joyful, off-beat lyrics make the material fairly interesting and humorous. "Empty Pocket Dreams" is a slow, pretty ballad, and "On The Moon" is a catchy, slightly whacky number. The standout cut in my mind is the last one, "Science Fiction Creature," a slow tempo guitar anthem. Extra reverb, double picking and whammy bar contribute to a winning ambiance here, quite Venturesque. Part of the packaging includes a peachy little insert with the particulars.

Claudia Malibu has yet to hit their stride but I think they're well on their way down the right road. And with a full length CD slated for September release, it won't be too long before we hear more from these

local astronauts.
(Wormco, P.O. Box 266,
Northampton, MA 01061)

- Meathook Williams

**STANTON MOORE
ALL KOOKED OUT!**
(Fog City Records)

The San Francisco-based Fog City Records is quickly gaining a reputation as a very funky label. It was founded by Dan Prothero, who has designed and produced many of the records on Ubiquity and Luv'n'Haight. It should come as no surprise, then, that their first two releases would head for the center of American music, New Orleans. Fog City's first release dealt with Galactic, New Orleans' best new funk band on the block. The second turns the spotlight on Galactic's hardest working beatbox, Stanton Moore. For his first (we can only hope that there will be more) solo outing, Stanton has sidled up a string of super sidemen, using Charlie Hunter (guitarist and Blue Note recording artist) and Skerik (saxophonist for Critters Buggin) as his basic lineup, but also keeping the door open for Michael Ray (of Sun Ra's Arkestra). The horn section from his offshoot group, Moore & More, can also be found haunting a few tracks.

This is a very funky record and comes highly recommended. Inside the grooves, you'll find tasty tidbits of jazz ("Honey Island") and brass bands ("Kooks on Parade"), but you'll most likely get caught on the generous portions of funk, be it the heavy horn section variety ("Blues for Ben"), or the low down chicken picking guitar style ("Tchfunkta"). Throughout the record, Stanton reminds us this is a drummer's album, filling every available space with his monster drumming. He even gets flashy, knocking out the rhythm of one song on a beer bottle.

A great record and certainly an artist to watch out for.

- Phil Straub



**20TH
ANNIVERSARY
COLLECTION**
(Blind Pig Records)

Many labels throw together "samplers", often at bargain prices, to gain a foothold for their artists at the retail level. One such label that immediately springs to mind is Alligator. However great though that outfit may be, my favorite such compilation to date is the new *20th Anniversary Collection* from Blind Pig.

A masterful blend of both new and old acts, but leaning a bit more to the old legends, this double CD (at a single CD's price) features 18 superb tracks on each disc, showcasing the cream of Blind Pig's impressive roster. Most of the blues sub-genres are represented - from the rockin' Gospel Hummingbirds to the biting slide guitar of Roy Rogers (no, not the cowpoke), to the seminal piano stylings of Pinetop Perkins. And not only great bluesmen, but great blueswomen are here as well - from the veteran Debbie Davies to the equally wonderful but lesser known Deborah Coleman.

A truly stellar bluesfest, *20th Anniversary Collection* is a great way to beef up your collection while not putting the hurt on your wallet. And at the same time you can celebrate two decades of one of the world's premier blues labels.

- Meathook Williams

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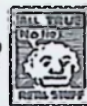


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ARMLESS IN DELHI

© Kenrut '98



Strictly speaking, he wasn't armless.



The Delhi Transport bus was jam-packed.



Men and boys hung on to the outside.



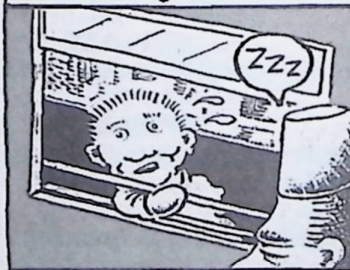
As the bus started up, the boy began to run.



At the right moment he jumped up ...



... and wormed his semi-arm through the bars.



Everyone on the bus went nuts...



... waking the sleeping gentleman...



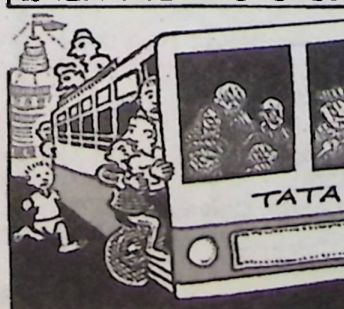
... who bowed, rocked, and prayed.



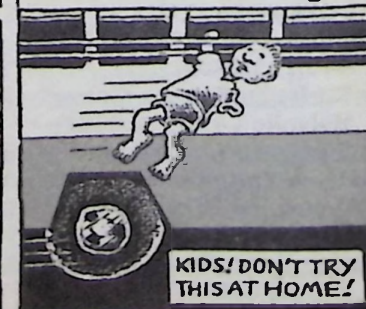
At every stop the boy landed on his feet...

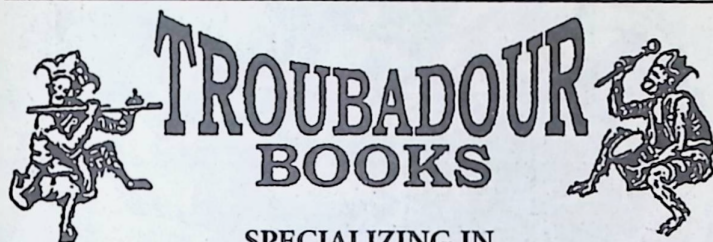


... then started over when the bus did.



And so on--until he got where he wanted to go.





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SLOW WAVE

by Ranjit Bhatnagar and Jesse Reklaw

I WAS ON THE HUMAN SIDE IN THE COWS VS. HUMANS SOCCER GAME.

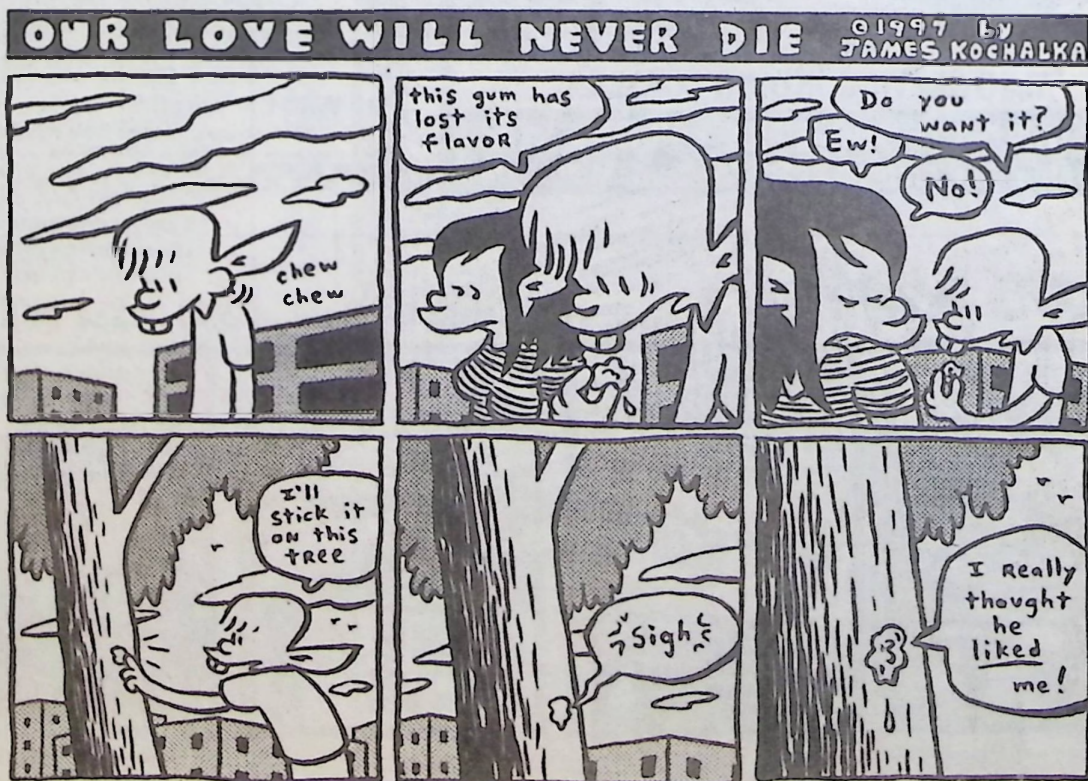
COWS 5
HUMANS 6

IN THE MUDDY FIELD, THE COWS HAD TAPED UP THEIR LEGS WITH ACE BANDAGES.

THEY WERE BIG AND MEAN, AND WE WERE AFRAID TO GET TOO CLOSE TO THEM.

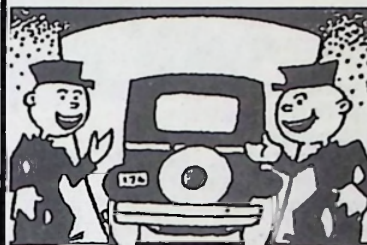
TO COMPENSATE FOR THEIR WEAK VISION, THE BALL WAS A DAY-GLO ORANGE.

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by Roger and Salem Salloom © 1997

*My mother says
when a woman gives birth
part of her mind comes
out with the baby and
that part is lost forever.*

*The hospital didn't
warn her about this.*

*She found out later
when I turned 15.*

*She said according
to Federal regulations,
she thinks when I move
out of the house she can
return to the hospital and
get it put back in her
head.*



VMail

vcromag@aol.com

POB 774 Northampton MA 01061

Send us your comments!

Dear Editor:

I very much enjoyed the Chet/Bunny guide to Northampton in issue 8. I would in turn, though, submit my own guide to Northampton that is of a generic nature, rather than focusing on the specifics.

Northampton wades in that zone between a true city and a small town. I believe that because Northampton barely qualifies as a city population-wise, it has a few elements that are interesting, but the overwhelming feel is of a small town.

Yes, we joke that it is the restaurant capital of the world, but in truth, they're

pretty safe and bland for the middle American palate. We have the standard Mexican, Chinese, Italian, but we lack those genuine foreign/ethnic food restaurants that true cities have. (C'mon Noho, how about a noodle shop? or Russian / Cajun / Ethiopian cuisine?)

Northampton is almost too nice. I have a theory that the town fathers want Northampton to be a sweet New England tourist town. There are some elements that are fun and interesting (a few museums, used CD/clothing stores), but truly diverse, multi-cultural stores and restaurants don't seem to exist here (too high rent possibly?). While

Northampton is a step above the bland "Main Street USA," how 'bout some more city?

Wondering,

Holly Moran
Northampton

Hmm. How about settling for city crime?

+++

Apologies to Jimmy K for a comment made in issue 4 about his club, the Castaway Lounge, as being "a shitty place to work." Said comment was the opinion of one writer and does not reflect the magazine's editorial stance. Another writer for VMag has described the Castaway as "my favorite," and "very cool."

Do you love VMag but are just passing through? Are you leaving for the summer? Leaving soon to go away to school? To take that job offer? To flee The Man? Yeah, well now you don't have to leave VMag behind...

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NEXT ISSUE: THE WILDING

(available July 15)



insuppressible

Satellite son of a guns
Searching through their past files
Zen-crocks, breeders, papier-mache
creatures of the night.

Low-life, picturesque
Expecting more than they can get.
TV babies renouncing their
consequences.

Quadric-minded
half fetus, half angel, half Gnostic
half savage.

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in a vortex.

O such children as these need love
from a parent; if ever there is
one.

- Daniel (Rayv) Vazquez,
December 1996

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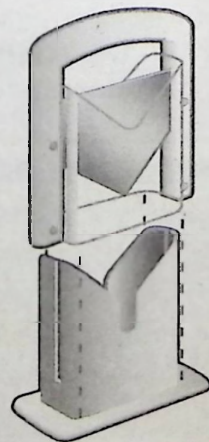
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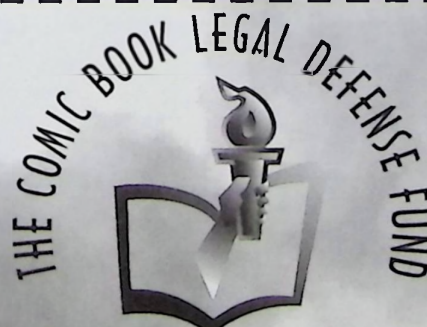
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Oh, just to feel his hair
tickle my thighs one more time.
To have his smile open on me
again, that warmth which is life
itself.

In the lead box he lay
squarely, stiff and unreal.
I felt the cool mouth
beneath my kiss...

